

**Department of Social Sciences**

**Navigating the Aid World: Barriers to the Effective  
Participation of Local NGOs in the Post-Conflict Environment  
of Timor-Leste**

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## **Declaration**

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

To the best of my knowledge this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgement has been made.

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**Lynne Margaret Butler**

October 2008

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## **Abstract**

This thesis presents an ethnographic study of a small local non-government organisation (NGO) negotiating its way through the complex, multi-layered, post-conflict, post-emergency environment of Timor-Leste. This is an environment that remains dominated by the aid industry, an industry that initially came to restore order and provide humanitarian support in the violent aftermath of the 1999 independence vote and stayed on to build a new Timor, in many ways created in its own image. In this environment a small local NGO struggled to maintain not only its vision and mission, but to fit within a new set of externally imposed conditions and regulations in order to serve its communities' needs.

Using ethnographic data gathered in the field over eleven months, this study paints a picture of a post-emergency environment on the ground and in the daily life of a local NGO within that environment. Combining ethnographic and interview data from local and international aid and development practitioners, the study also identifies the internal and external challenges faced by the local NGO in navigating its way through this environment. The internal challenges faced are largely in response to externally imposed conditions, and include the adaptation to new language and communication technologies, new styles of leadership and organisation management, new financial accountability processes and procedures. All of these challenges are coupled with the lack of experienced and skilled staff. The external issues relate to interactions and relationships the local NGO has with the aid industry, and the issues arising out of these engagements including ideological differences, donor dependency, unequal relations, and externally imposed directives.

While acknowledging that these are very real challenges, this thesis argues that it is the underlying factors behind the presenting challenges that are the real barriers to the effective participation of a local NGO in the post-conflict, post-emergency environment. Using post-development writings and Foucauldian theories as a theoretical framework, this thesis explores how thought, ideology and action are governed and controlled by the subtle mechanisms of liberal governance, (particularly in their redefinition), and local language is appropriated and reconceptualised as a tool of governance. It is the inability to understand or detect these subtle mechanisms of governance that often limits the degree to which an

NGO can be said to act self-determinedly, or in full awareness of the situation, as they navigate a path through this foreign and often baffling post-emergency environment.

This research adds to the emerging academic body of research on NGOs in post-conflict, post-emergency environments. On a practical level it provides aid and development organisations and aid practitioners with a detailed 'insider's' view of the operations of a local NGO and the impacts on a small organisation of externally imposed conditions, regulations and hidden agendas. Finally, it provides field workers intending to conduct research in post-conflict, post-emergency environments with an introduction to the issues and problems associated with this type of research.

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# Chapter One

## Introduction

### 1.1 General Introduction

This thesis presents an ethnographic study of Knua Buka Hatene (KBH) a small, local, Non-Government Organisation (NGO) based in Dili, the capital city of Timor-Leste<sup>1</sup>. The research data were gathered over eleven months from April 2004 to July 2005, two years after Timor-Leste became a sovereign state and four years, five months after the United Nations Security Council authorised a humanitarian intervention in Timor-Leste following the violent aftermath of the 1999 independence vote. This period also represented a time of transition for Timor-Leste as it moved from a stage of post-emergency recovery to a stage of long term development and reconstruction<sup>2</sup>.

The purpose of the research is to gain a detailed understanding of how an indigenous NGO survives in the post-emergency, reconstruction environment of aid and development. The study focuses on how a local NGO navigates its way through the changing environment and the challenges and issues it faces as it balances and reconciles its own needs, and the needs of its community, against the external conditions and regulations of the aid industry.

### 1.2 Background

To speak of a post-conflict or post-emergency environment is a broad categorisation. Post-conflict environments are never truly free of violence and the threat and menace of newly emerging conflict is never far from the surface (McKechnie 2004). For Timor-Leste visible violence erupted suddenly again in April-May, 2006, over 5 years after relative calm nevertheless punctuated with spasmodic episodes of conflict, and violence continues to play a debilitating role in peoples' lives today. As a result of the 2006 crisis, over 150,000 people were displaced, over 6000 houses burnt, and 37 people were killed. In September 2007, UN sources (*Security Council Report: September 2007 Timor-Leste* 2007) claimed that over 100,000 people remained displaced in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps or in the districts and at least 30,000 of this group were located in camps in Dili.

Knua Buka Hatene as a local non-government organisation (LNGO) was born out of a history of political and social insecurity, de-stabilisation and conflict, similar to most

local NGOs in Timor-Leste. The people that staff local NGOs, particularly those under 30 years of age, were born into that history and are in many ways a product of it, just as their parents were born into and are a product of colonialism, as were their parents and many generations before them. Today those who have survived the occupation, civil unrest and colonisation periods have done so by adapting to, negotiating with, and resisting, both passively and actively, the rules and conditions of the colonisers and occupiers. The resultant behaviours and adaptation strategies are not easy to understand or interpret, particularly by those coming from the 'outside' who have not experienced a similar environment or a similar history. Any understanding of a local NGO and its members, must be viewed in the context of the country's complex social and political history.

### **1.3 Political History**

For over four centuries Timor-Leste, then known as Portuguese Timor, existed as a Roman Catholic Portuguese colony. In 1975, with limited preparation for independence, Portugal under domestic political pressure made an abrupt exit leaving Timor-Leste to make its own path to statehood. On 28 November, 1975, an unprepared Timor-Leste, still divided by internal political and social cleavages, declared itself independent. Nine days later with the declaration still unrecognised internationally, Indonesia seized the opportunity to invade Timor-Leste and annex it as an Indonesian state, citing internal disintegration and instability as its justification for doing so <sup>3</sup>.

Twenty-five years of Indonesian occupation followed, marked by violence and brutality as Timor-Leste nationals continued to fight within the country for independence (CAVR 2005). In 1997, following a change of government in Indonesia, talk of an independence vote for Timor-Leste grew in strength both nationally and internationally. In August 1999, following the UN sponsored vote for self-determination with 95% participation, Timor-Leste won its fight for independence. This long struggle, culminating in the post-independence violence unleashed by Indonesian supported militias, resulted in not only the deaths of many thousands of people but the destruction of nearly all existing infrastructure as people fled to the mountains for safety or were forcibly deported to West Timor. On 23 September 1999, International Peacekeepers (INTERFET), led by Australian forces, arrived in Timor-Leste to restore order. The United Nations Transitional Administration in Timor-Leste (UNTAET) was quickly established to provide a transitional government. The first elections were held in August 2001, and in May

2002 Timor-Leste finally became a sovereign state, the first new nation of the twenty-first century (CAVR 2005).

Despite achieving international legitimacy as an independent state, Timor-Leste remained, in many ways, an occupied country. As the Indonesians fled and the peace keeping forces arrived, the 'aid world' as Brunnstrom (2003) noted, soon followed. The new occupiers in this case came to bring emergency assistance; restoring basic infrastructure and ensuring safety so that people could return from exile, whether from the mountains or overseas, to begin re-establishing their lives. The relatively conflict free zone created by the UN peacekeepers, also allowed existing local (indigenous) NGOs to resume their activities and newly developing NGOs and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs)<sup>4</sup> to contribute to the reconstruction work alongside the international aid agencies and organisations (Hunt 2004; Brunnstrom 2003)<sup>5</sup>.

Although initially seen as a liberating force, the international aid and development industry, or what Escobar (1987) terms 'the apparatus of development', had a profound impact on every facet of Timorese life: socially, politically and economically (UNTAET report to Donors, World Bank Report, 2000). As Guttal (2005, p. 73) describes "[P]ost-war/post-conflict reconstruction literally involves everything from demobilizing armed groups and peace-keeping, to writing new constitutions, formulating new national laws and fast-tracking foreign investment". Many local organisations and their members consequently found themselves negotiating vastly new territories where the priorities, processes and procedures were being defined by new stakeholders with new agendas<sup>6</sup>.

Timor-Leste is not alone in experiencing the profound impact of international assistance. Aid and development is a multi-million dollar industry and many millions of dollars in international donor funding are spent every year assisting 'poor' countries or 'fragile states' to re-establish infrastructure after dramatic national upheaval as a result of conflict or war. This 'assistance' is not applied in a haphazard way but rather follows what Guttal (2005, p. 73) terms the emerging 'development model' which generally includes:

- a UN-led mission for 'transitional' administration, peacekeeping and donor coordination; donor support for electoral, constitutional and governance activities to shape new national leadership; formulation of national development plans and policies by foreign experts; national institutional 'capacity building' by private (usually foreign) firms; the transfer of key services and assets to



private sector firms; and a plethora of international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and newly emerging national/local 'civil society organizations' (CSOs) engaged in activities ranging from micro-credit and primary health care to democracy education and human rights training.

The major international financial institutions (IFIs) such as the IMF, The World Bank and in terms of Timor-Leste, the Asian Development Bank, are also important players in this picture, as are other multilaterals agencies<sup>7</sup>, and bilateral<sup>8</sup> donor nations. All have a clear set of economic and political principles and priorities attached to their assistance (see for example *East Timor: United Nations Development Assistance Framework (2003-2004)* n.d.; *CAPET: Capacity Building Program for East Timor Project* n.d; 'WORLD BANK: Independence planning for East Timor -- A road map for the future' 2001).

#### **1.4 The Aid Community and Local NGOs in Timor-Leste**

In Timor-Leste an interdependent relationship exists between international and local NGOs involved in the reconstruction or rebuilding of civil society. This relationship presents challenges for local NGOs which, despite their local knowledge and expertise, often work within an environment over which they feel they have little control. Brunnstrom (2003) who studied the relationship between Timor-Leste and international NGOs post-independence, states that while the international aid community is publicly committed to developing programs based on trust and respect for local cultural and historical knowledge and practices "... there is still a considerable gulf between rhetoric and practice" (2003, p.318). In more general terms, Brunnstrom claims "[s]ocieties in transition often experience the arrival of international agencies as an invasion that threatens local control over the development process" (Brunnstrom 2003, p.320).

In the transition from the emergency/crisis phase to the post-emergency/post-crisis/ long term reconstruction phase of development, the number of NGOs in Timor-Leste fell dramatically from 271 in 2002 to 137 in 2004 (*NGOs in East Timor* 2004). This contraction in numbers happened at a time when World Bank research shows that a post-conflict country is most able to absorb and utilise aid (McKechnie 2004). The high attrition rate among indigenous NGOs during the transition phase is often viewed by international aid agencies and organisations as inevitable and even desirable, a view grounded in the belief that the strong will survive and the weak will fail. While this view may contain truths, it fails to acknowledge that during the emergency stage international agencies actively encourage and support the

proliferation of local NGOs and to some extent contribute to the organisational weaknesses they later criticise. Local NGOs during the emergency phase are valued for their assistance at the grass roots level. To these ends they are characteristically 'flooded' with funds and resources while minimal restrictions, guidelines and financial accountability processes are applied. Often international agencies in the rush to distribute funds and assistance for humanitarian reasons, as well as to appease organisation and donor expectations at home, give less thought than is needed to the long-term sustainability and strengthening needs of local NGOs and the long term adverse impact of 'unequal relationships' upon them.

### **1.5 Problem Statement**

There is a dearth of independent, long-term ethnographic research that studies the impact of the aid industry on local NGOs in post-conflict environments, particularly during the transition phase from post-emergency recovery to long-term development. While there are studies that pin-point weaknesses and strengths in the structures, processes, and accountability procedures of local NGOs few elaborate the less tangible issues and challenges faced by local NGOs as they navigate the changing environment.

### **1.6 Aims and Objectives**

The major aim of this study is to gain a detailed understanding of how a local NGO in a post-conflict environment balances and reconciles its own needs and the needs of its community with the externally imposed conditions and regulations of the aid world in the post-conflict, post-emergency environment of Timor-Leste.

The three main objectives of the thesis are to:

1. Document the operations of KBH, including its historical and ideological underpinnings, values and beliefs, to understand how these elements shaped and continue to shape the work and structure of the organisation.
2. Identify and describe the organisation's interactions and co-relationship with the international aid world, focusing on how the organisation is shaped by, and in turn shapes that interaction.
3. Identify the major challenges faced by the NGO in maintaining its vision and mission and conducting its activities as it navigates the transition from post-emergency to long-term development.

## **1.7 Argument**

The thesis argues that it is not the obvious challenges, such as the lack of strong leadership and financial management, which present the greatest barriers to the effective participation of local NGOs in the post-conflict, post-emergency environment of Timor-Leste but the less tangible barriers, the unseen agendas. There is a 'gulf' between rhetoric and practice as Brunnstrom (2003) suggests, but it arises from the 'gap' in the understanding - of international workers and local NGOs alike - about the operations and mechanisms of governance that go on behind the scenes in the post-emergency environment and are embedded in every facet of NGO life. It is the inability to understand or detect these subtle mechanisms of governance that often limit the degree to which an NGO can be said to act self determinedly or in full awareness of the situation as they navigate a path through this complex and multilayered post-conflict, post-emergency environment.

## **1.8 Significance of this Research**

This research will add to the emerging body of academic research on reconstruction after social upheaval (Arnold 1998). Presently, limited work exists in this area outside of United Nations agencies, the World Bank and other aid and humanitarian organisations. The thesis also contributes to the growing body of literature on the role of local NGOs and the State in development, particularly in areas of empowerment and capacity building in post-conflict, post-emergency environments.

On a practical level, a detailed ethnographic study of an NGO operating in a post-crisis situation will provide western aid organisations with what Spradley (1980) describes as an 'alternative reality,' a view that is not completely culturally bound by western values, knowledge and understanding (Knauft 2002). This alternative reality may, in turn, assist aid organisations, and aid and development practitioners, to reflect on their own operations and actions within the post-conflict, post-emergency environment.

At a local level, for the local NGO involved in the research and similar NGOs, the research findings will provide useful and practical information for improving their capacity to negotiate the aid world in a way that maximises the benefits for themselves and for their client community in the long-term.

Finally, at a research level, the thesis provides new field workers intending to conduct research in post-conflict countries, particularly where there is a heavy

international aid presence, with an introduction to the issues and problems related to this type of research.

## **1.9 Overview of the Thesis**

This thesis is presented in nine chapters.

Chapter Two: provides the background to the choice of research topic and chosen research subject and also introduces ethnography as the method for conducting the research. It gives the author's own account of conducting research in a post-conflict environment dominated by the international aid industry, and drawing on current literature, defines and characterises some of the issues and challenges encountered. Lastly, it outlines the research methods including the data collection, data organisation and analysis and the format for the presentation of the findings and discussion.

Chapter Three: paints a picture of the post-conflict aid world on the ground in Timor-Leste, what it looks like and how it is experienced at a local level. The chapter also outlines the history of local NGOs and civil society organisations in Timor-Leste prior to independence and up to the present long-term development phase, to provide a context in which to understand the present study.

Chapter Four: seeks to place the Timor-Leste aid intervention experience within the greater context of the discourse of development. In doing so it examines the historical and ideological underpinning of development. It then explores post-development theory and its critics, as a means of challenging pre-conceived notions of development as well as constructing a framework for examining development as a discourse, and as a model of intervention. Lastly it looks at the role of local NGOs within the development context, as a means of understanding the issues and challenges faced by these NGOs in the larger picture of development.

Chapter Five: addresses the first objective of the research by introducing KBH, its historical and ideological underpinnings, values and beliefs, and how these have shaped the work and structure of the organisation. It also begins to address the second objective of the thesis by providing an ethnographic account of the organisation as it functioned from April, 2004 to August, 2005, and the issues it faced during that time as it tried to develop new relationships with international donors. The ethnographic account is augmented by short scenarios which appear in boxes throughout Chapter Five and in following chapters.

Chapter Six: continues to address the second objective of the thesis as well as addressing the third objective which is to identify the major challenges faced by KBH in maintaining its vision and mission and conducting its activities in the post-conflict environment of aid and development. Drawing on data collected as a participant observer during my time in the field, and interviews with local staff working for KBH and other local NGOs, it presents an 'insiders' view of the main challenges as seen from the perspective of local NGO workers.

Chapter Seven: presents an 'outsiders' perspective by examining the findings from interview data from international aid workers and the issues and challenges they identify as impacting on local NGOs.

Chapter Eight: brings together the findings from Chapter, Five, Six, and Seven and seeks to discuss these findings within the greater context of development as examined in the literature review and preceding chapters.

Chapter Nine: concludes the thesis by summarising the main issues and reflecting on lessons learned.

# **Chapter Two**

## **Doing Fieldwork in Timor-Leste**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter provides the background to the research and to the choice of the research subject. It also introduces ethnography as the research method employed in the study. It gives a personal account of conducting this form of research in the field as well as exploring some of the issues and problems encountered in doing so. Lastly, the research method is outlined including an explanation of the way in which the research objectives were approached and the way in which the data obtained were organised and presented.

### **2.2 Background to the Research**

This research project emerged in November, 2002 when I visited Timor-Leste for two weeks on a small study grant. As a vocational education and training practitioner with 15 years experience in indigenous training as well as being a long-term committee member of several Australian NGO Boards, I was interested in the work of local NGOs involved in livelihoods training in the non-formal sector<sup>9</sup>. More specifically I was interested in local NGOs, who, influenced by socialist ideologies coming from Cuba and Brazil, were using 'popular education' or 'education for liberation' practice, a methodology based on the theories of South American, Paulo Freire. Freire's theories espouse the use of education as a tool for emancipation through collective action. This type of education practice is often seen as running counter to the mainstream and I was interested to see how it would adapt itself to the development environment, and more particularly how local groups using this methodology interfaced with the more westernised model of development and reconstruction.

During my visits to different agencies and organisations, international and local I was struck by the overwhelming presence of the international aid industry and how seemingly separate it was, socially, economically, culturally and ideologically, to the lives of local people. This observation re-affirmed my earlier decision to focus my research on the interface between a local NGO and the aid industry

Through my initial exploration of the various agencies and organisations operating within Dili, I came across Knua Buka Hatene (KBH) a small local Timor-Leste NGO which was conducting vocational training and popular education activities

throughout the district of Dili and surrounding areas. The organisation well encapsulated principles of liberation and social justice that had originally drawn me to the research area. Whilst the organisation itself was relatively new (KBH was officially established in 2001), it was made up of staff who had extensive experience in the non-formal sector having come from other NGOs or who had a background in student solidarity and resistance groups.

KBH had other qualities, which typified local NGOs operating in Timor-Leste at the time, making it an appropriate subject for the study. The organisation was made up of a mixture of paid staff and volunteer staff who worked with the organisation periodically (when a project was running), full-time, and part-time often holding down jobs in other organisations. Its activities were overseen by a board of management made up of people from related NGOs and it had an executive committee, mission and objectives. As with many local NGOs at this time, it also was engaged in a partner relationship with an international NGO which provided technical and financial support to the organisation.

Perhaps most importantly KBH, because of its affiliations and networks, and its close physical proximity to many other local NGOs, was not only an ideal subject but an ideal vantage point from which to observe the operation, experience, and day-to-day activities of other local NGOs and their interaction with the international aid industry in Timor-Leste.

### **2.3 Why Long-term Fieldwork?**

Another issue that I was confronted with in my 2002 visit was the staggering number of 'fly-in-fly out' consultants and researchers like myself, who were arriving for a few weeks, doing the rounds of similar organisations, often interviewing the same limited group of people, and then departing. My conversations with fellow researchers and consultants did not ease my qualms. My concerns, and ones shared with researchers across a range of disciplines (Dowler 2001; Markowitz 2001; Sanjek 2000; Cole 1988; Marcus & Fischer 1986; Spradley 1980), were for the limitations of the picture being captured in such a restricted time, and for the reliability of the data gathered, particularly in such a complex and multi-dimensional post-conflict situation. I therefore decided that my research should take place over an extended period of time and that I would situate myself in the field as an observer and as a participant in order to gain an holistic view and understanding of the world from the perspective of a local NGO. Another important consideration for me was that by situating myself with an NGO whose core work was training, I would be able to offer

some type of a contribution to the work of the NGO in exchange for my data gathering.

## **2.4 Ethnography as a Method for Studying NGOs**

Having decided to embark on long-term field work involving a small local organisation, ethnography seemed the obvious choice of methodology to employ. Ethnography is literally a written account of the way of life of a group of people, their customs, beliefs, and behaviour, which is based upon information collected in the field (Harris & Johnson 2000). Although it originated as a form of anthropological inquiry, today ethnographic research is used across disciplines and in a variety of situations and contexts to investigate a broad range of communities and organisations. Ethnography takes as its purpose the understanding of people in their social environment. It does so by documenting their lives and their activities, attempting to understand their experience or reality from their own point of view. It also allows for this behaviour to be conceptualised as an expression of wider social themes or contexts (Reinhartz 1992).

Ethnography is an appropriate methodology for studying communities, groups, and cultures for four main reasons. Firstly, it is long term; it involves the observation of a group over an extended period of time allowing for in-depth analysis of the group, its activities and the broader context in which its activities occur. Secondly, ethnographic research is responsive and adaptive, its “learning to testing nature” (Agar 1996) means it can follow the direction that the research is going or follow the researchers’ own path allowing them to narrow in on different research subjects or areas of interest. Thirdly, it is also flexible. An ethnographic approach can change to suit the conditions, use different techniques, methods and draw upon a range of qualitative and quantitative research methodologies (Sarantakos 1998). Fourthly, ethnography is especially amenable to studies which are exploratory or descriptive in nature (Genzue n.d). Exploratory studies are well suited to the style of ethnography because it has the ability to gain general information for the purpose of describing the way things are or describing a reality as it is experienced by individuals.

Ethnography also allows for information on the aspects of an environment or its variables to be gathered and situated (by the researcher) within the context of a wider field of debate, but it does so by blending the practical with the theoretical. As Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest, ethnographic research might be used to “put flesh on the bones of general constructs and their relationships” (p.27). As such



ethnographic research provides the kind of information that may be used to generate an hypothesis or add insight into areas requiring further research.

Generally ethnographic research draws on three types of data collection: participant observation; interviews; and document analysis. Of these three data collection methods it is participant-observation (a key feature of fieldwork) that really distinguishes ethnography from other social research methods because it locates the researcher firmly within the research site. The ethnographic researcher lives with and/or works with the people they are studying for an extended period of time. This unique style of data collection which 'embeds' the fieldworker within the day-to-day life of the community allows the ethnographic researcher to share "as intimately as possible in the life and activities of the people they are wishing to study" (Cole 1988, p. 7).

It is this 'embeddedness', of the researcher in the community, that helps yield research data of the richest kind because people's behaviour is studied in everyday contexts, enabling a view of the community that includes a day-to-day account of its operations as well as an individual's own interpretation of events. Ethnographic research, as Clammer (1984) suggests, yields the kind of data that cannot be gleaned from document analysis or interviews alone.

It is, however, this same 'embeddedness' that can create for the fieldworker a myriad of problems and anxieties. The researcher in the field is forced to continually make judgments and decisions about their role within the community and the validity, reliability and objectivity of the data gathered as well as the ethical concerns of revealing and concealing data. Some of these issues will now be discussed.

## **2.5 Situatedness: the Art of Location of Self within the Field**

In many ways the post-conflict, post-emergency, reconstruction environment of Timor-Leste renders the dilemma of how a researcher should situate her/his self within the research group null and void. The decision is in fact made for you, as in this environment there can be no 'passengers'. There is too much at stake for local people, and there is too much that you, as an international researcher/worker, can do for them. You may observe, question, discuss, and interview but, as I quickly found out, if you intend to spend any time in the field attached to an NGO you will definitely participate.

I first started my ethnography with KBH as a volunteer and one of the hats that I immediately started wearing after entering the field, intentionally or not, was that of 'International aid worker'. As an international worker I was one of the 'privileged' few and therefore presented as a very useful commodity. No matter what your personal and professional background might be, you have the advantage of speaking and writing English – the language that is used for the majority of the written documents and applications submitted for funding. Most NGOs are dependent on foreign grants and any engagement brings with it a myriad of report writing, proposal writing, monitoring, and meetings, all required to be conducted/submitted in English. This is apart from the use of unfamiliar technological equipment such as scanners, email, computers, fax and skype which also require English language skills.

As an international worker you are also privy to the world of foreign international workers that largely direct how money will be spent in the country, where and with whom. You move in that world, unreachable to most Timor-Leste NGO workers, of visiting the cafes and bars; you talk of work, you receive advice, you receive information, you negotiate terms and contracts. In short, you develop a network of contacts with other international workers and international agencies that may connect you to a source of funding. You therefore become a vital link between the two worlds that local people would find very difficult to bridge.

In the second stage of my fieldwork I began to wear the hat of KBH 'adviser', my main job being to 'build the capacity' of KBH staff in vocational education and training. It was a volunteer position sponsored by an Australian aid organisation, APHEDA-Union Aid Abroad (APHEDA), and through them partially funded by the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID). I not only took on new roles and new responsibilities but in a very short time went from an independent and relatively passive role to a very active one with ties and responsibilities to not only KBH but also the international aid community.

At the same time as I took on this role KBH was going through a major structural change stage and as both an international worker and adviser, I had skills and experience to assist them through that transition. My fieldwork, consequently, became action research as we together designed and implemented new strategies and processes for dealing with international agencies and donors and the work of the organisation. On reflection, I was playing a part in shaping the NGO into an organisation that international agencies and organisations could work with. I became, in short, an instrument of the 'apparatus of development', an ethical

dilemma in itself. However, the shaping process was not one-way and as much as I was shaping the organisation, I was also being shaped by it.

## **2.6 The Relationship between Subject and Researcher**

As an ethnographic researcher you are located squarely in the field and in seeking to place yourself within the community you must negotiate all sorts of personal, social, physical and cultural territory. Much of this negotiation involves personal decisions about how you will conduct yourself in the field, and to a certain degree the form which your personal relations with subjects will take. As Appell (1978) says, you must choose the role you will play, how much of yourself and your goals you will reveal to the group, as well as being prepared to acknowledge that a consequence of making friendships within the group might lead to the distortion of your observations.

My other roles within KBH included: friend; respected senior women; colleague; and tutor. Although I did not live with the group, we often travelled and socialised together and over time I developed close friendships with the female members of KBH in particular, and with staff in several other local organisations. The women not only extended their friendship to me in an open, accepting and uncritical way, but also invested a great deal of emotional energy in me. All of which provided me with a deep insight into their work, family and personal lives and a rich field of data, but at the same time bound me with a responsibility to them and their future. This personal responsibility presented me with all sorts of questions about what I could and should disclose in my research and the extent to which I could use the data without harming the people involved, them as individuals or as an organisation.

Another unanticipated consequence of doing fieldwork, in the post-conflict aid and reconstruction environment, was the number of friends and acquaintances I made within the expatriate international community, nearly all of whom worked for international aid organisations, UN agencies or bilateral agencies. While providing me, both informally and formally<sup>10</sup>, with an enormous amount of information and insight into the aid world this also presented me with another layer of responsibility and dilemma about what could and could not be said and how to say it, if indeed it could be said at all, and where to draw the line between researcher and friend.

Many of these people were walking a fine line and in their own words “trying to balance the needs of the donor against the needs of the communities” with whom they were working. This meant I was not only ‘studying down’ but ‘studying up’ and ‘across’.

A more problematic side of ethnographic fieldwork is as Clammer (1984) states, the subject/object relationship between the fieldworker and those observed. This relationship is often based upon “unequal power and resources” and can be “temporary and exploitative for the observer but may have many unforeseen consequences for the observed” (1984, p. 65).

In the post-conflict environment of Timor-Leste where many local NGOs are dependent on funds from international donors, to reveal weaknesses of a particular NGO may cause a donor to lose confidence in that NGO and withdraw support. Similarly to reveal a local NGO’s negative experiences with, or criticisms of, an international donor may have the same negative response. The researcher may have the data they need and it may enrich academic knowledge but the NGO is left worse off.

## **2.7 Ethics and Responsibility**

As with all social research, ethics is an important consideration when conducting research in the field (Myers 2001; Akeroyd 1984; Ellen 1984; Appell 1978). In Timor-Leste this is particularly the case with ethnographic research because the participatory nature of the research method means the researcher is very much bound up in the responsibility of the study. As such, certain precautions, preparations and experiences are essential components of doing this kind of research and even then, as Barnes (cited by Akeroyd 1984, p. 154) states, “a good researcher lives with an uneasy conscience but continues to be worried by it”.

Ethics is considered by many to be one of the major issues in fieldwork (Myers 2001; Cole 1988; Akeroyd 1984; Ellen 1984; Appell 1978). It is an area which has fluid boundaries and few guidelines. Ethics also cuts across nearly every facet of ethnographic research, particularly issues relating to the researchers situation within the group, representation and voice (Cole 1988). In discussing ethics, Cole (1988, p. 12) states that it is a complex issue which many fieldworkers choose not to talk about. Some issues can be worked through using a professional code of ethics “but others ultimately rest in the conscience (and consciousness)” of the researcher (p.12). Fieldworkers, she contends, are always working on three levels: the personal, the political, and the academic, and it is the tension between the three which causes ethical dilemmas. The problem is less complex for those fieldworkers who have a clear affiliation with one level: if they believe their academic results are all important then the personal and the political will not get in the way. However,

most fieldworkers “respect and value all three” and walk a fine line between balancing the needs of all (Cole 1988, p.12).

Appell (1980) adds another dimension to the debate by highlighting the power differential between the researched and the researcher and the ethical problems that “unequal” situations create. He notes that when a researcher is working in a community that has little power within the greater society, or is at odds with the dominant culture, unrealistic expectations might evolve regarding the researcher’s access to power and spheres of influence. He adds that a question we should be asking is how much does the researcher give to the host community in exchange for invading their privacy and opening them up to the possible risk of punishment or retaliation. He then poses the question of whether a researcher should directly involve him/herself in trying to “change the power relationship between the larger society and the host community, when the host community is at a disadvantage” (p.14).

These issues were a constant anxiety for me in the field and anxiety remains in the writing of the research. As outlined above, an international worker has special status in the reconstruction environment and unrealistic expectations can develop, not only on the side of the local NGO. Your position of power and privilege can distort your own belief and expectations of what you can do and what you should do. Quite often I found myself as the intermediary, the broker, between the NGO and the aid industry. I could skilfully take the language and aspirations of the aid industry and trim and shape the expectations and actions of the NGO to fit these, or vice versa. However, after I had walked away what had changed? Both groups were reasonably happy with the outcome – but what had been gained and what had been lost? Integrity? Commitment to ideology?

## **2.8 Representation**

Representation is the way researchers represent their informants and the research situation in text. In discussing representation, Lincoln and Guba (2000, p. 164) cite two main concerns inherent in traditional research writing. First, the researcher can over simplify complex issues, and second, the writing may reflect the dominant culture, fixed views, and embedded ideologies, and overlook other ways of seeing and interpreting information. The real danger is that the researcher inadvertently substantiates or perpetuates those traditional views and ideologies by their research. Lincoln and Guba argue that a way of avoiding the “dangerous illusions” that texts might perpetuate is to find new ways of representation, ones that “break

the boundary between “science and literature” and portray the “contradiction and truth of human experience” (2000, p.184). They extol us to “break the rules” if that is what is needed in order to show, “even partially, how real human beings cope with both the eternal verities of human existence and the daily irritations and tragedies of living that existence” (p.184).

For me, the issue of representation has been an almost paralysing phenomenon in writing up my research. Local NGOs in the aid reconstruction environment are largely dependent on international donor funding for their existence and the continuation of donor funding is dependent on outcomes which are embodied in final reports and evaluations. As the author/co-author of many such NGO reports, in Australia and overseas, I know first hand what is submitted and what is omitted, what is embellished and what is minimised, and depending on the audience, how the truth is defined and how the outcomes are manipulated. I could simply represent the organisation from the basis of a document analysis but the picture I would present is a vastly different view and understanding from the one I know from first hand experience. The dilemma is how to represent the NGO in text without damaging an organisation’s reputation and ultimately their income stream, and also, how to tackle difficult issues without white-washing them so that ‘lessons learned’ (a phrase heavily used in the development world) can really be understood and enacted.

A further concern about representation is how it relates to translation, not simply as it relates to language but to the translation of meaning. This is an extremely important issue, as Cole (1988) points out, particularly for those conducting research in countries where the language and culture are alien to the researcher (Cole 1988). Many times throughout my fieldwork I sat through weekly staff meetings and monthly board meetings. While I could speak and understand some Tetun<sup>11</sup> and Indonesian when people spoke slowly, when things became heated during a meeting I would lose track of what was being discussed. In these instances I relied largely on my reading of body language as well as having snatches of conversation hastily translated by one of the young English speaking staff members. I was getting ‘some’ picture of what I thought was going on based upon the agenda and the pre-history to the topic. However, in one instance, after a meeting when I had the opportunity to discuss the proceedings in some depth with the young worker, I found my assumptions were totally wrong. They were based on my own culturally determined experience and prior learning of how people act and react to others and

situations within a given social context. Hence being aware of these problems as a researcher in a different language and culture is critical.

## **2.9 Voice**

“Voice is how authors express themselves within the inquiry” (Lincoln & Guba 2000, p. 183). In the past the researcher’s voice was non-existent, it was the “voice from nowhere”, nor was the informant’s voice heard but through the researcher’s own disembodied text. More recently there is greater recognition that the voices of both researcher and researched should be firmly located within the text. Just as I am physically located squarely in the research, my voice also comes from there. In some instances, cast as an international worker and adviser, I become, as Rosanna Hertz (as cited by Lincoln & Guba 2000, p. 183) describes, “the subject of the inquiry”. I am not telling a personal story, though there inevitably will be aspects of that within the text as: who I am, what I believe in, and what I do. These aspects have partly driven my choice of research topic, methods and analysis just as how I interact with others has influenced my acceptance within the research group and the level of openness with which they respond to me.

As Myers (2001) reminds us, ethnography is not our personal journey but belongs to those we situate ourselves with and expose through our writing to an audience, which they, the researched, have little or no choice in determining. “Respect for, and intensive collaboration with, people in peripheral societies requires a strategy that balances an expression of our situatedness with careful, thoughtful and protective silence” (2001, p. 197). The story is primarily the story of the organisation and the people within it, set in the specific context of the post-conflict, aid and reconstruction environment, but it is their story with me in it. By using my own voice and theirs, I am not only exposing them to the outside world but myself also. This action has heightened my own sense of accountability and responsibility to the group, the actors and the context. After all, I will be judged not merely by a small academic circle removed from the research field but by those work colleagues, associates and friends who have informed the research and whose everyday lives I have chosen to examine and make public.

## **2.10 Building a ‘True Story’**

The image of a qualitative researcher as a “bricoleur” or quilt maker who brings together pieces of history, politics and everyday life to form a montage or representation of reality, as described by Denzin and Lincoln (2000, p. 4) is both evocative and provocative. It is evocative because it opens a door to social research

that allows that there is not one story or linear representation of life and human activity, and provocative for the very same reasons. From the perspective of a quantitative researcher this description might provoke claims that the image gleaned is unscientific because it is not substantially based on quantifiable data. Rather, the research is based on observation and is therefore by nature subjective rather than objective, open to interpretation, and prone to having more than one answer.

The question posed from this dual image is how can qualitative research be both multi-linear, interpretive, and at the same time reliable, trustworthy and value free: the answer is probably, in positivist terms at least, that it cannot be. Lincoln and Guba (2000) claim that research can never really truly be objective as there are many 'truths' related to human existence, depending on the way it is viewed. However, by the careful use of multiple methods of investigation or 'triangulation' a particular truth can be exposed that has greater meaning than a linear representation can yield.

### **2.11 Reflexivity**

One of the most critical activities or thought processes for an ethnographer is coming to terms with not only the research problem we choose, but with ourselves, and the multiple identities we assume in the research setting. This process is known as reflexivity and entails critical reflection on the self as a researcher and knowing the self as "inquirer and respondent, as teacher and learner" (Reinhartz as cited by Lincoln & Guba 2000, p. 183). Reinhartz suggests there are three main categories of "self" we bring to the research and they are the research-based selves, brought selves, and situationally-based selves. All these categories must be examined as they influence the type of research we do, how we conduct ourselves in the field, and what we write.

Reflexivity is the ethnographic tool used by researchers in the field to deal with the questions raised earlier in the ethics section. There is no text book to read or supervisor to tell you how to act or what to think. These questions can only be answered in the field by constant thoughtful self-examination and reflection and by being as well informed and prepared as you can be about the situation, the actors, the hidden agendas and your own pre-conceived notions and beliefs.

In the field I found reflexivity to be unquestionably the most often used process I employed and a constant and often irritating companion. After a long and difficult day there is nothing like self reflection to sap your confidence and your energy, and



to make you rethink your approach, your capabilities and your personal ability. The sheer drag of being human in a human field can be totally debilitating. On the other hand it can be the process by which you can take stock, and from which lessons can really be learnt. It provides the space for you to step away and to see not only the situation but yourself as an actor in that field in all your various guises. It also allows a space to reflect on your priorities and responsibilities to your research, yourself and ultimately to your research group.

## **2.12 Research Method**

My research design was based on Spradley's (1980, p. 26-29) circular ethnographic research model. This method allows the researcher to act as a 'bricoleur', bringing pieces of the quilt together as Denzin and Lincoln (2000, p. 4) suggest, sorting the pieces, seeing how they fit and what patterns emerge, and then re-sorting them again and again until the final pattern emerges and the quilt is stitched into place.

Spradley's method is based on:

- Selecting a research project;
- Asking questions about that topic;
- Collecting data;
- Making an ethnographic record;
- Analysing data from the ethnographic record; and
- Going back to step one and refining and redefining the research project at each step of the process in an ongoing cyclical fashion.

This process allows the research questions to evolve within the research rather than outside it.

## **2.13 Field Design**

This research was conducted with KBH and involved three fieldwork stages from April 2004 to July 2005:

Stage 1: 15 weeks in April – July 2004;

Stage 2: 16 weeks in September– December 2004;

Stage 3: 22 weeks in February - July 2005.

During each of the three stages of the project I was able to move through Spradley's circular model refining the research questions and gathering and analysing data in an on-going process.

#### **2.14 Data Collection**

Ethnographic fieldwork entails data collection through a variety of methods. I employed three types of data collection, namely participant observation, document analysis and interviews which included informal and semi-structured design. Each method is explained as it relates to the three fieldwork stages.

#### **2.15 Preparation for Fieldwork**

During the first stage of the study I prepared myself for work in the field by reading widely about other people's experience in the field (Dowler 2001; Gade 2001; Matheson 2001; Myers 2001; Kaghan et al. 1999; Pratt 1986) and attended workshops on various aspects of qualitative research. Spradley (1980), Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) and Ellen (1984) were all helpful texts in drafting the broad outline of my research design. Hammersley and Atkinson's (1995) book was also particularly helpful in providing ways of organising data. Ultimately, however, I found Nelson's (as cited by Hammersley & Atkinson 1995, p. 4) following observations helpful and liberating in terms of giving me freedom to choose my field approach. Nelson notes that the qualitative researcher can use whatever "strategies, methods or empirical materials are at hand" and if "new tools or techniques are needed then the researcher will do this; the choices as to which interpretive practices to employ are not set in advance"; and finally that "the choice of research practices depends upon the questions that are asked and the questions depend on their context", what is available in the context, and what the researcher can do in that setting. In other words, the research site is fluid and unpredictable and a researcher needs to be inventive and flexible as well as reflective and rigorous in their approach.

#### **2.16 Stage 1: Entering the Field. 15 weeks April - July 2004**

This stage was very much about establishing the research environment and building up contacts, identifying key persons, getting to know the staff, the Board and key stakeholders, establishing relations and generally settling into the group. I also needed to get a clear understanding of:

- KBH's history, organisational structure and function;
- KBH's ideology, mission statement, values and core beliefs;

- The profile of the people within the organisation and its closest partners;
- The skills and experience of staff and their connection to the organisation and to each other;
- KBH's client/community base and the type of service provided to them by KBH; and
- The local and international organisations most closely related to and working with KBH.

I did so by working in a voluntary capacity with KBH. My role as a participant observer was fully disclosed to the group, the Board of Management and major stakeholders including APHEDA-Union Abroad, KBH's major donor/partner. The Board of Management gave me approval to carry out the research and to access documents.

### ***Data collection***

The organisation allowed me access to all their operational, planning and historical documents. These included:

- Flow charts of the structure and functions of the organisation;
- Profiles of their partner organisations; and
- Proposals and tenders, budgets, reports to funding organisations, training program outlines and guidelines.

I also acted as scribe for the strategic planning process the organisation went through soon after I arrived. The process was conducted over one week and I was given access to these documents. An evaluation session was also held a few weeks later by an international researcher undertaking an evaluation of AusAID funding projects and again I was invited to participate in this session.

### ***Internal interviews***

Most of the interviews at this stage were done within the organisation and were conducted on an informal basis. For example, I learnt more about the organisation and those who worked in the building from sitting on the steps at the front of the building, listening and talking to groups or individuals, than from more formal interviews. My focus was to get an understanding of each person's connection to KBH and to each other. I also wanted to identify key people from within KBH and

outside it for the second phase of my research when I planned to conduct more structured interviews

### ***Journals***

I kept a daily journal to record the day-to-day work of the organisation such as activities and meetings and informal discussions with KBH staff and its associated organisations.

I also kept a reflective journal. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, reflexivity is an important part of conducting ethnographic fieldwork and the journal helped me reflect on my various 'roles' within the organisation, such as researcher, international worker, colleague, and the ways in which these roles were impacting my research.

Notes from these journals have informed the earlier part of this chapter.

At the end of this period I refined the questions, in consultation with my supervisor, for the next stage. From this process my second and third objectives or questions were broadly developed namely 1). How does KBH interact with the international world? and 2). What are the major challenges it faces in so doing?

### **2.17 Stage 2: Fieldwork. 14 weeks September - December 2004**

During this stage my work role with the organisation changed quite dramatically as I took on a technical adviser role at the request of the organisation. This change, while giving me greater insight into KBH's interaction with the international aid industry, also challenged me to be more reflective about my part in steering that interaction and shaping KBH to a more western model of development.

### ***Data collection***

I continued to gather ethnographic data through observation, document analysis and informal interview. My focus at this stage was on my second objective relating to KBH's interaction with the aid world. I particularly focused on interactions and recorded these as case study scenarios (data from these scenarios augmented in stage three, are presented in boxes in Chapter Five and following chapters).

### ***Interviews***

Carrying on from Stage One, I developed eight key local contacts with whom I had daily or weekly contact. This group was drawn from within KBH and related organisations. These contacts were mostly female and at mostly under 30 years of

age. All had worked for local NGOs or international NGOs for more than a two-year period and held a variety of positions within their organisations. This group represented local workers across a wide field of local NGOs and appear in the following chapters as, Key Local (KL.20 - KL.27).

I also had more formal discussions with six other contacts from various other local NGOs. These people were generally from larger organisations and held more prominent positions within their organisations and amongst local NGO groups. They also had more interaction with international organisations and agencies. This group appears in the following chapters under the code, Key Local (KL.27- KL.33).

### ***Journals***

I continued to keep a daily journal which I combined with the reflective journal focusing particularly on my changing role within the group and the ethical repercussions of the change; that is, how this might impact on the integrity of my research.

## **2.18 Stage 3: Exploration. 22 weeks February - July 2005**

In the first three months I continued data collection and informal interviews and started to talk around the issues that KBH staff and staff from other local NGOs felt were impacting on them. From these informal conversations, as well as issues specifically outlined as weaknesses and challenges in the KBH strategic plan, and my own observations, I started to draft a table. This table looked at the issues, their background and the consequences for KBH. Data from this table form the basis of the findings presented in Chapter Six together with the anonymous voices of local workers.

I also started to refine a set of more focused questions I wanted to ask key local and international workers.

### ***Semi-structured interviews***

In the last month of fieldwork I spent four weeks interviewing key local and international staff in a series of semi-structured interviews. My intention was to ask both groups a range of questions primarily focused on what they thought the challenges were for local NGOs working with international organisations and agencies, particularly in the transition phase from post-emergency to long term-development, and also what they believed to be the major internal and external challenges faced by local NGOs.

I selected two local staff from my close local contact group (as above) to assist the conduct of the semi-structured interviews. Both contacts spoke English fluently (I did not understand the local language) and therefore could convey the meaning of my questions to the rest of the group. The answers they gave, therefore, often reflected the group of eight rather than a single voice. Their specific comments augment the many hours of informal discussions with all eight close local informants and six other local informants.

The international interviewees were not chosen randomly. Some I chose because of the length and breadth of their experience in the field and some I chose because of their position in an organisation or because of the type of organisation/agency for which they worked. What I was trying to achieve through the interviews was a thoughtful exploration of the issues by a group of experienced people from another perspective.

At the time of the interviews:

- Four of the international interviewees worked for a multi-lateral agency, (United Nations agencies);
- Three worked for a bilateral agency, for example US Aid, AusAID or New Zealand Aid, and two of these were senior managers;
- Five worked for international non-government organisations;
- Two worked for local government supported by bi-lateral funding; and
- One worked for a local NGO.

Each international interviewee was rated on their importance to my study on a scale of 1-5, the criteria being their level of personal experience in Timor and in similar post conflict countries, the type of work they were doing and the level at which they were working in regards to LNGOs, their core work relationship with LNGOs (example: funding, capacity building, partnering, and their ability to speak the language).

Of the 15 interviewees, nine rated five on my scale and of these, seven spoke fluent Tetum. In short, the individuals whom I had selected were extremely experienced, committed, hard-working and knowledgeable people and, while they were loyal to their organisations, they were open and honest about their own and their

organisations' limitations and inadequacies. This group appears in the following chapters as Key Internationals (KI.1- KI.15).

## **2.19 Data Analysis and Review**

While data analysis was done on a continuous basis throughout the three phases of field work, the final organisation of the data took three shapes: document analysis, ethnographic and case study description and interpretation, organisation and reduction of interview transcripts into themes and threads.

### ***Document analysis***

As outlined in Stage One most of the document analysis was carried out during field activities and forms the basis of the first section of Chapter Five.

### ***Ethnographic and scenario description***

These data were organised to reflect the research objectives and appear in the thesis in two ways:

- As an ethnographic description of KBH in chapter five, which gives a 'snapshot' of the organisation as it was from 2004-2006, and
- In the form of vignettes or scenarios contained in boxes in Chapters Five and following chapters, which attempt to exemplify or relate lived experience to the issues discussed in these chapters.

### ***Reduction and interpretation of interview data***

The interview data from the semi structured interviews were organised around the following headings and themes:

1. Internal challenges to meet external conditions:
  - Language and technology; staffing and recruitment; and governance including leadership and management, financial management and administration.
2. Interface issues:
  - Donor relationships; ideological differences; dependency and legitimacy; unequal relationships, and networking and transition issues.

From analysing and reviewing the data I also began to form the 'bigger picture' questions about what I wanted to explore further in my literature review. While a literature review is sometimes done prior to fieldwork, I have used the literature

review as part of the exploratory process of this research. As Punch notes (1998), how and when to do a literature review is a matter of judgment and can be influenced by several things including; the research problem; the research questions; and how much the researcher wants to follow established directions. In terms of this research it was not until I was in the field that I really understood how all encompassing the aid environment is and that a local NGO cannot be viewed as separate to that world. Therefore, the major part of my literature review, as it appears in Chapter Four, was done during and at the end of my fieldwork study as a way of making sense of what was happening 'on the ground'.

## **2.20 Limitations of the Research**

This study focuses on one local NGO in Timor-Leste. It is a particular type of NGO that evolves out of the post-conflict, post-emergency and is almost entirely financially dependent on international funds. Therefore it is not representative of all local NGOs in Timor-Leste or in post-conflict recovery situations but shares many similar characteristics with a high percentage of them.

The international and national interviewees interviewed during the conduct of the research were not selected randomly but chosen deliberately by the researcher on the basis of their experience and skills or their position within an organisation. The conclusions drawn and recommendations made from this research must be viewed in the context of these limitations.

However, an in depth study of a single group can provide important detailed information about particular cases.

## **2.21 Conclusion**

I have deliberately introduced this chapter before the literature review because I believe by doing so it assists the reader to make better sense of the research and the context in which the data were collected. This research started with an idea that took me into the field with questions and as such became an exploration of not simply local NGOs but the world that surrounds them and through which they must navigate. The following chapter introduces that world; one dominated by the aid industry, and locates Timor-Leste NGOs within it.



## **Chapter Three**

### **The Aid Industry and local NGOs in Timor-Leste**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter describes what the aid and reconstruction industry looks like in action on the ground in Timor-Leste, its characteristics and the immediate impacts on the local community. It then looks at the history of local NGOs from before and after 1999, paying attention to how the aid and reconstruction industry impacts local NGOs, in the varying stages of emergency, post-emergency, and transition into long term development.

#### **3.2 Enter the UN as UNTAET**

In October 1999 the United Nations Security Council officially established the United Nations Transitional Administration for Timor-Leste (UNTAET), a United Nations mission to oversee the recovery and rehabilitation of Timor-Leste following the dramatic violence and devastation unleashed by Indonesian soldiers and militias in September 1999. In mid-November this mission began taking responsibility and control from the United Nations (UN) Organisation for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance (OCHA) which in turn had replaced the United Nations Mission in Timor-Leste (UNAMET). UNAMET had been in Timor-Leste to organise and conduct the vote of the Popular Consultation in September 1999.

By the time the UNTAET arrived in Dili, after the International Force for Timor-Leste (INTERFET)<sup>12</sup> forces led by the Australian Army had stabilised the city and the last Indonesian soldiers had left, the city was virtually empty of people and infrastructure. A United Nations report estimates that 500,000 of the territory's population of 800,000 were forced from their homes and nearly all infrastructure was either damaged or completely destroyed. A whole scale humanitarian relief effort was also under way, providing emergency food and shelter and basic services, carried out by other UN agencies. In a unique situation UNTAET moved into what could be described as a vacuum because for the first time in the history of the UN, a UN operation was given license to take control of all government departments including: finance, justice, infrastructure, economic and social affairs (Ishizuka 2000). The huge recovery and nation-building program, supported by the large UN Peace Keeping Force (PKF) of 8,950 troops and 200 military observers, was already set in train as local people and expatriates began returning to Dili.

### **3.3 The UN Revisited as UNMISET**

The post-emergency world of aid and reconstruction is a strange one with many surreal qualities. Keeping pace with the regular changes of names of missions is bewildering enough in itself. My first experience of a post-emergency environment was in Timor-Leste in late November 2002, almost 3 years after the independence vote (Popular Consultation) and five months after Timor-Leste had become a nation in its own right<sup>13</sup>. The UNTAET mission ended and was replaced by a new mission called the United Nations Mission in Support of Timor-Leste (UNMISET). The US dollar replaced the Rupiah as the accepted currency and Portuguese became the official language, despite the fact a generation of Timor-Leste young people spoke only Bahasa Indonesian, Tetun and local dialects. Although Timor-Leste was not yet a member of the World Bank or the IMF, both organisations were playing an integral role in the reconstruction process. International NGOs from many parts of the world were represented and advisers from bilateral donor countries were numerous

In Dili itself basic infrastructure and services such as water and electricity supply, even if haphazard, had been restored and while many buildings remained burnt out several had been rehabilitated for use by the government, UN agencies, bilateral and multilateral bodies as well as international NGOs. Several hotels had also been refurbished catering mainly for international workers, as had restaurants, cafes and supermarkets. Consequently the cost of living in Dili, with the influx of international workers and American dollars, had risen dramatically. An enduring memory of that time was sitting in a café on a main street near the post office in Dili at lunch time. The entire street appeared to be lined with new UN four-wheel drive vehicles as the international staff both civilian and military, lunched at the cafes and restaurants which lined the street. It would have been easy to be persuaded, by the cosmopolitan atmosphere of one particular café, that you were on a Melbourne café strip or in some European city, if not for the stark contrast of the burnt out buildings opposite and the taunting of a young male phone card seller by a relaxed PKF soldier, lunching with friends, and all with machine guns over their shoulders.

Photographing that scene I wondered what sense the young local population was making of this new world of which they were now a part. The tensions in Timor-Leste at that time seemed palpable with unemployment and poverty levels high and an uneasy relationship existing between young people and Special Forces including the police. It did not seem surprising when two weeks later Dili erupted into violence over a demonstration involving teachers and students who were protesting about the

aggressive tactics by a special police force when arresting a student accused of being involved in a gang killing. During the ensuing riot one student died and shops and hotels were looted and torched in the central district.

### **3.4 UNMISET Mark II, 2004**

By the time I returned to start my research in April 2004, the situation had changed quite dramatically. Timor-Leste was well into a transition phase, what the UN calls the post-crisis/emergency stage. By May, 2004 the Peace - Keeping forces had left following the Independence Day celebrations which marked the second birthday of the republic, leaving a skeleton staff of UN administrators and advisers. Many Timor-Leste had lost their jobs as UN support staff, while many international advisers were asked to continue, but on much reduced salaries. UNMISET (United Nations Mission in Support of Timor-Leste) had officially ended its mission but its life had been prolonged for at least another year. While the peace-keepers had departed, a strong United Nations Police (UNPOL) presence remained, drawn from across the globe (Turkey, Samoa, Zambia, Australia, Brazil to name a few places), who were 'guiding' the Timor-Leste police force in good policing techniques. Few of them spoke Tetun, Bahasa Indonesian or Portuguese.

### **3.5 Major Characteristics of a Post-crisis Country**

Countries recovering from long-term conflict, particularly where there has been major intervention by the aid world, have several characteristics in common. Summarising Mckechnie<sup>14</sup> (2004), these characteristics include continuing instability and insecurity particularly where reconciliation has not been achieved between internal forces which can lead to either "an unstable alliance of competing parties or to an uneasy coalition between fighters and technocrats who have sat out the war in relative comfort abroad" (p. 1). Furthermore, there is a low capacity to absorb aid in the first three years due to institutional and physical constraint, high public expectations of the benefits of what peace will bring and unrealistically high expectations by donors for quick results where donor policy makers have little understanding of the difficulties involved in all aspects of project implementation. All of this he argues is worsened by the "CNN" effect, namely that when a post-conflict country is least able to effectively absorb foreign assistance it is inundated with it and contrarily, just as it reaches the point where it is most able to benefit from help, interest diminishes dramatically.

In Timor-Leste the general characteristics as described by Mckechnie (2004) were evident coupled with characteristics more specific to the Timor-Leste experience.

First, there was a new and relatively inexperienced government trying to work within a new democratic system after a long period of conflict, with a low GDP and a low rate of interest in terms of international investment (*CAPET: Capacity Building Program for East Timor Project* n.d). To balance the budget the new government was dependent on funding through bilateral and multilateral donors and, as such, was subject to the rules, regulations and governance of the IMF, World Bank and donor countries (*East Timor: United Nations Development Assistance Framework (2003-2004)* n.d). Second, a large expatriate Portuguese speaking community had returned from exile and took up many leadership and public service jobs, from which many of the ex-combatants and Indonesian speaking young Timorese were excluded. The consequences of this scenario were a tiered society and a degree of instability and dissatisfaction with the government, particularly felt by the combatants who had fought for liberation with seemingly little reward (Garrison 2005). Third, as the huge international presence, including UN agencies, multilateral and bilateral donors as well as international aid organisations began to diminish more local people lost their jobs in the service and support industries. The cost of living, however, remained relatively high and there was enormous disparity between the salaries of international and local workers. Fourth, the legacy of a long history of colonisation and occupation also manifested itself in a largely unskilled workforce (predominantly agrarian based), high rates of illiteracy, a high percentage of the population under 25 with few employment opportunities, as well as poor health statistics and the majority of the population living in poverty (*East Timor: United Nations Development Assistance Framework (2003-2004)* n.d). Finally, as McKechnie (2004) observed, just when Timor-Leste in 2004 was at the peak of its ability to absorb foreign assistance a large portion of the aid industry moved on.

### **3.6 History of NGOs and Civil Society Organisations in Timor-Leste before Independence**

Local NGOs and civil society organisations (CSOs)<sup>15</sup> have had a long history in Timor-Leste and played an important role in the struggle for independence from the later half of the 1970s to 1999, not only in terms of resistance but by providing education and health services (Hunt 2004)<sup>16</sup>. As Hunt describes, these organisations which include, student groups, youth groups, and women's groups, as well as organisations formed under the banner of the Catholic Church, worked courageously under extremely difficult and often dangerous circumstances from within a repressive regime.

International aid organisations also had a considerable input into Timor well before the Independence vote in 1999. In the late 70s the Catholic Relief Services (CRS) and the international committee of the Red Cross, entered Timor-Leste and provided emergency relief “after the Indonesian invasion and a famine” (Hunt 2004, p. 4). After 1989, however, as the Indonesian regime began to allow more contact with the outside world more international agencies began to provide support to local groups and in the 1990s several international NGOs began working on the ground in Timor-Leste. During this period, more local NGOs also started to form, focusing on human rights, women’s rights and violence against women as well as health and emergency relief. In an attempt to establish an organising body, the Timor-Leste NGO Forum was started in 1998 by local groups, but their work was hampered in 1999, as Hunt (2004) outlines, by the worsening security situation.

Young people in Timor-Leste played a crucial and often dangerous role in resistance to Indonesian occupation from 1975 to 1999. In 1998 the Timor-Leste Student’s Solidarity Council (ETSSC) staged a demonstration involving 10,000 to 15,000 people, calling for a referendum and the release of political prisoners held by the Indonesians. Students from ETSSC continued to play a prominent part in the lead up to, and during, the Popular Consultation, firstly in public education and secondly as observers at the referendum, often putting their own safety at risk. In 1996, Jose Ramos Horta<sup>17</sup>, in an interview said it was the youth of Timor-Leste who were providing most of the active resistance (Horta n.d). Many students and young men and women were also involved as UN volunteers in preparing and registering people for the popular consultation and were targeted by the militias in the violence that followed the vote. Many were also the first back on the scene to dispense aid and to play an active part in the restoration of their country.

### **3.7 The Emergency Period and Dislocation of Local NGOs**

As Hunt (2004) observes, local NGOs lost everything in the violence and destruction following the referendum and NGO members like the majority of Timor-Leste people were forced to flee to the mountains, overseas or across the border into West Timor. By the time they were able to return, the aid community, including many international NGOs, were already working under the direction of the UN office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance (OCHA) to provide much needed emergency supplies including shelter, water, food, medical assistance and water and sanitation.

Although the intervention was timely and stopped the immediate violence, tensions immediately started to grow between the returning locals and the newcomers. Both Hunt (2004) and Brunnstrom (2003) have reported on the tensions that arose during this time between local NGOs, Timor-Leste political leadership and the International community, in particular. In Hunt's words the "Timorese [local NGOs and political leaders] were feeling excluded by the huge international presence" and the situation was further aggravated by the "disparity in resources" of the UN compared with those of the Timorese leadership and local NGOs (Hunt 2004, p. 5).

Brunnstrom<sup>18</sup> makes two important points regarding the 'mindset' and attitudes of the international relief staff at this stage. First, she observes, the relief organisations and their staff initially arrived in Timor-Leste to carry out immediate relief operations. They had a specific task; they were focused on that task and were trained to conduct those operations according to procedures. Presumably the task did not include, or leave time for, extensive negotiations with local leaders and NGOs. Second, and more importantly, Brunnstrom comments, that they came with "an attitude common to international organisations: namely that of assuming that the systems and institutions that function best are those created in the image of those dominant in Western countries" (2003, p. 314). In nearly all her discussions with local NGO workers, Brunnstrom claims they expressed their disappointment in the international NGO's lack of knowledge and interest in "local circumstances, history, culture, traditional social structures, and languages". Furthermore, little time and effort was put into improving their understanding while "standardised solutions and approaches reflecting a top-down Western attitude to development applied" (2003, p. 314).

The following comments in a paper evaluating UNTAET's performance in the emergency stage appear to exemplify some aspects of the "mindset" and "attitude" to which Brunnstrom referred. The author of the paper, Dr Ishizuka (2000, p. 7)<sup>19</sup>, citing an interview with the Deputy of Civil Military Affairs, UNTAET, states, that "failures in implementation of the emergency plans arranged by his department were related to difficulties with local NGOs" who were considered "unprofessional and untrained" while others "totally lacked communication and coordination skills within their organisations".

Hunt and Brunnstrom were not alone in reporting on the tensions existing between local NGOs and aid industry during the emergency period. Independent reports on the work of the United Nations Organisations and the World Bank at that time reflect

similar concerns. While acknowledging the difficult circumstances that international staff were working under during the emergency period, the reports point to the lack of inclusion of local NGOs in the relief and decision-making processes during this time and in the lack of prior knowledge about local language and politics and culture held by international staff (*A Review of Peace Operations: A Case for Change* 2003; Hurford 2001). Despite the apparent lack of the engagement of local organisations during the emergency, the enormous effort local NGOs had made prior to the emergency was recognised as they were responsible for supplying the majority of humanitarian assistance.

This is not to say that local NGOs were without problems and weaknesses. Many were flooded with funds without having the proper financial accountability processes to deal with the funds or strong and experienced leadership. Criticisms of local NGOs came not only from external sources, but from among local NGOs themselves. Hunt refers to these criticisms as does Holloway (2004). In several interviews I had with local NGO workers, they also pointed to weaknesses in the leadership of some of the less experienced NGOs (KL.30, KL31).

### **3.8 NGOs in the Post-emergency Period**

It is not easy in aid terms to be exact in defining when the emergency phase ends and the post-emergency, reconstruction phase begins, as different agencies have different views on this. Some of the bigger organisations like USAID and the UN agencies have a clear delineation and as one phase finishes new staff and new programs move in. This can cause problems in terms of continuity and consistency with partner organisations, particularly local organisations, which struggle to keep up with the changing language and criteria of the new group as well as the new faces.

By the time UNTAET had finished its mission in Timor-Leste in May 2002, the number of local NGOs had swelled from the 34 registered with the UN in January 2000, to 231 registered with the NGO Forum<sup>20</sup> in early 2002 (*NGOs in East Timor* 2004). These NGOs were working across a wide range of areas including agriculture, livelihoods, women's rights, and human rights, as well as playing an important role in education and advocacy. Several NGOs played, and continued to play, a 'watch dog role', providing critical feedback on how Timor-Leste was being re-shaped and advocating continuously for a much greater say for Timor-Leste in the development process. Many of those involved in the new and established NGOs were young people, often students, who had taken part in the early demonstrations



before the Popular Consultation and many had strong ideas of a democratic socialist society strongly influenced by Cuban and South American models (KL.32)<sup>21</sup>.

### **3.9 2004: Local NGOs in Transition**

By 2004 the number of NGOs had dropped from 231 in 2002 to 170 (*NGOs in East Timor* 2004). Some that had been set up purely for single projects or to assist in the emergency response had come to the end of their life while others struggled with a lack of operational funds that would enable them to continue their work. By this time many international NGOs had left the country while others continued on but with greatly reduced programs. Most local NGOs, no matter how strong, were in a state of transition. Dili-based local NGOs particularly those with an international volunteer working with them or a local staff member with international experience, were in a better position to negotiate the change as they had better links to information networks.

### **3.10 Shaping the Process of Change**

In the broader picture of how local NGOs were being shaped by, and responding to this new environment, Janet Hunt (2004, p. 25) outlines the possibility of donors “driving the agendas of local NGOs” as local NGOs struggled and competed for funds while trying to come to terms with new ways of reporting and operating as required by donor organisations. Richard Holloway (2004, p. 9-10) in his paper on Civil Society Organisations in Timor-Leste, also talks about the “new breed” of local NGOs that had emerged during the emergency, who were totally dependent on external funding and in danger of operating according to donor agendas rather than responding to the needs of the communities they represented.

Whilst communities and individuals are often eager to take on new ways of doing things, (new economic systems, ideas, or even interventions to reduce violence, etc), it is reasonable that they should want to pick and choose from what is available and incorporate the bits they think will fit into their existing ways of doing things and do this on their own terms. In many ways it’s all about remaining in control and shaping your own future. Hence, whilst Holloway may suggest that NGOs were in danger of operating in accordance with donor agendas, he fails to recognise that NGOs are equally capable of taking advantage of the additional donor funds to work to their own advantage and to the advantage of their communities.

This thesis adds to the work of Hunt, Holloway and Brunnstrom by representing the less heard voices of local NGO workers, the ones who normally would not be



interviewed. This is a group who, while they may have problems and criticisms of the institutional and systemic rigidity of the aid industry, nevertheless appreciate and learn from the human face of aid and development as represented by the many international aid actors with whom they interact.

### **3.11 Conclusion**

In Timor-Leste local NGOs have had a long history of adapting and shaping their operations, firstly under the strict Indonesian rule, then later post-1988 with a more 'liberal' Indonesian government when more NGOs were able to operate, and more recently since 1999. All these different stages have required that NGOs negotiate with those in power and with external funding agencies to sustain their existence. It is how they strategically negotiate, adapt, shape, and bend to the varying political and economic situations that are of most interest in understanding the workings of local NGOs. Whilst Hunt and Brunnstrom point to how overseas donors were driving the agendas of local NGOs, this in itself is not too surprising nor does it reveal much about what was exactly happening within the NGOs and how they were adapting to these new donor demands.

The following chapter seeks to place the humanitarian intervention in Timor-Leste within the greater context of global development intervention and the role of local NGOs in that sphere.

## Chapter Four

### Development: From Discourse to Practice

#### 4.1 Introduction

Long before the crisis situation occurred following the independence vote in December, 1999, and the United Nations Security Council authorised an official intervention on humanitarian and security grounds, plans were being made outside the country for its recovery and long term development<sup>22</sup>. Who makes these plans? What are they based upon? Under whose authority are they implemented? And, what historical, ideological, political, economic, security and social agendas underlie them? These are some of the questions I explore in the first section of this chapter where I examine the history of development to intervention.

The second section of the chapter looks at post-development theory and its critics, not to determine if 'development' works or if it is 'right', but as a means of firstly 'unthinking' and 'rethinking' my own notions of development, and secondly, constructing a framework for examining development as a discourse and as a model of intervention. Similar to post-development writers who have used the work of Foucault as a 'departure point' for critiquing development, I am interested in the extrapolation of his observations on power and governance to the development context. More specifically, I am interested in exploring Foucault's theory of liberalism as a rationality or technique of governance, as a starting point for understanding the complex set of relationships linking the state, the development apparatus and civil society (NGOs) in the aid and reconstruction context, and how this informs the language of development.

The third section of this chapter looks at the 'Third Sector', a broad term that encompasses non-government organisations in all their various forms, both international and national. It looks at how NGOs are defined, their role in development, and the issues faced by local NGOs in their 'partnerships' with international NGOs and multilateral and bilateral agencies. In essence it seeks to place local/indigenous NGOs within the broader context of the development framework in order to examine the issues and challenges they face on a daily basis in a local surrounding from a global perspective.

## **The Development of Development**

### **4.2 Meanings and Understandings**

There are many meanings and understandings applied to the concept of development. It can be used as Haugerud and Edelman (2005, p. 86) describe, to “connote improvements in well being, living standards, [and] opportunities” and it may also refer to industrialisation, modernisation or globalisation”. Escobar (2005, p. 432) a post-development writer, states that ‘development’ can be best described as “...an apparatus that links forms of knowledge about the Third World with the deployment of forms of power and intervention”. From an economic perspective it can be seen simply as a “flow of financial resources” linked to a set of conditions, priorities and procedures which are determined by a global coordinating body (Malmqvist 2000, p. 1). The first definition implies a movement or progression towards an accepted goal whether social or economic; the second describes development as a totality of information, power and action directed at a defined target; the third describes it as a mechanism of economic control from an international perspective for the good of all.

For those of us who have grown up in the West, the Global North, or the ‘First World’, or what we might loosely call a ‘developed country’, we may vaguely think of development as a state of being that we exist in, and something to which ‘underdeveloped’ or ‘Third World’ countries should aspire to, or at least be assisted in attaining. As citizens we may question our governments’ interventions and motives in the name of development, but we rarely confront the notion of development itself. Without really understanding or questioning why, we may have, as Tegegn (1997, p. 7) remarks, “surrendered” ourselves to the dominant paradigm and discourse of development.

### **4.3 The Historical Phases of Development**

While Haugerud & Edelman (2005) propose three historical stages of development, and trace the first stage back to the rapid growth of industrial capitalism in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, for many writers the ‘modern’ history of development started in the 1940s after WW II. For this group the starting point was the Bretton Woods conference held in New Hampshire, USA, in 1944, attended by the United States and the heads of 43 European countries. It was during this conference that the Bretton Woods financial institutions, International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, were established. The initial purpose of the institutions was to support European countries, ravaged by war to gain economic security for their citizens. A

new economic plan for international economic cooperation was devised which included “a system of fixed currency exchange rates, limitations on capital movements across national boundaries and the institutionalising of national economic planning to promote growth “(Haugerud & Edelman 2005, p. 6). The three key architects of this new plan were the US Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau, his chief economic advisor Harry Dexter White, and British economist John Maynard Keynes (*Bretton Woods Project* 2007). As the de-colonisation process started, Asian, African and Latin-American nation-states were soon included.

At much the same time as the talks were going on around the formation of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, discussions were also being held to establish a new international organisation which was to replace the League of Nations. On the 24 October 1945, in San Francisco, with the ratification of the United Nations Charter, the United Nations officially came into being. It was initially proposed and deliberated on by representatives from the United States, the United Kingdom, China and the Soviet Union (*About the United Nations/History* n.d.). Fifty countries, predominantly from Western Europe, signed the charter which, while proposing to uphold human rights and maintain peace and security, also sanctioned the deployment of the “international machinery for the promotion of the economic and social advancement of all peoples” (*Charter of the United Nations* n.d.). By 1945 the World Bank and the IMF, supported by the United Nations as the international governing body, became the major apparatuses of development with a mandate to bring peace and prosperity to all.

#### **4.4 The Invention of the Third World**

Not all writers see the Bretton Woods conference as the pivotal moment in modern development history. Many writers, particularly those critical of development itself (for example Escobar 2005; Esteva 1992 and Sachs 1992), see the defining moment as United States’ President Truman’s inaugural speech in 1949, in which he declared the Southern hemisphere to be ‘underdeveloped’, and it to be America’s task to use its technological and scientific expertise to raise living standards in these ‘underdeveloped’ areas (Esteva 1992, p. 2). For Esteva (1992 p. 6) it was at this pivotal moment in history “that two billion people became underdeveloped” and under that blanketing label lost their “diverse cultural and social identities”. Escobar (2005), Esteva (1992) and Sachs (1992) have described this moment variously as a time when the “dream”, “myth”, “fairytale” of ‘development’ and ‘underdevelopment’ became part of the modern discourse and through it the ‘Third World’ was invented.

However this was not merely a 'dream', as this group of writers observe, it was a time when the 'poor' suddenly became visible and identifiable as a problem and interventions were planned to lift them out of their poverty with America and Western European countries as the 'developed countries', showing the way.

#### **4.5 East, West, North, South Relations**

Offering a more geo-political view of development history, Corbridge (1995) sums up the post World War II stage in the following way. He describes it as a product of largely Western European and North American ideas of progress which emerged in the 1940s and 1950s against a backdrop of de-colonisation of the global south, and growing tensions between the USA (the West/North) and The Soviet Union (the East). As such it was constructed as part of a battle to "win the hearts and minds of the rest of the world" (Corbridge 1995, p. 1). The 'rest of the world' included the newly emerging states in Africa, Asia and South America which were coming out from under the mantle of European colonisation. They were being offered, in this early stage, two models of development or progress, one based on capitalism and the other on socialism (Berthoud 1992, p. 71). However, the breakdown of the USSR in the 1990s left one dominant model of development and the geo-political language became predominantly North-South orientated rather than East-West based. It followed, as Corbridge (1995) states that flows of money, information, knowledge and technology, should be south bound and the North held up to be the model to which the South should aspire. It was a widely accepted view that developing countries "could and should" learn from the "developed or pioneer countries" (Corbridge 1995, p. 2).

#### **4.6 Development, Globalisation and Neoliberalism**

The third stage of development as Haugerud and Edelman (2005) write, began in the 1970s and continues today. It began with the breakdown of the Bretton Woods economic controls which they argue, citing Philip Michael, was "the beginning of the end of the (national as opposed to global) development project" (2005, p. 17). This stage was characterised by "a series of economic policy changes that were known (outside the United States) as economic neoliberalism" (2005, p. 7). Neoliberalism, in this context meant free market policies where the market, rather than the state, determines economic and other outcomes. This new economic rationale was in contrast to earlier economic models based on Keynesian theory which advocated a much greater role for the state in public spending and as an economic driver and regulator for growth. In stark contrast the 'market' during this period came to be

seen as Gerald Berthoud (1992, p. 70) states, no longer as an “institution which must be regulated by external forces” but one that should be used “to regulate society as a whole”.

At the same time as the new free market policies were taking effect the World Bank and International Monetary Fund adopted a new language and focus, and “poverty and equity issues” became their prime concern as opposed to their former emphasis on promoting economic growth (Haugerud & Edelman 2005). In line with this change in thinking in the 1980s and 1990s, the World Bank and International Monetary Fund embarked on a program to institute in poorer nations a key set of reforms known as Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs). As Haugerud & Edelman (2005) describe, these reforms embodied many neoliberal economic principles including; reduced state spending on social services; the instigation of fee-for-service education and health care; deregulation of the financial and labor market, privatisation of state owned resources and currency devaluation (Haugerud & Edelman 2005).

#### **4.7 The Failure of Development**

Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPS) a major plank of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund policy for development and poverty reduction, have been widely criticised from within and without the institutions. Joseph Stiglitz, Nobel Prize winner for economics in 2001 and chief economist with the World Bank from 1996-2000 has been one of the chief critics. He states that the first pressure exerted on a developing nation by multilateral institutions and their shareholders, is to liberalise their economies to make them more competitive. This liberalisation process involves deregulation of their financial markets and the promotion of free trade, foreign investment and privatisation of national enterprises. Developing nations are also pressured to open up to foreign investment. The negative effect of an open free-market economy, however, is that there is no market regulation (Stiglitz 2002).

Stiglitz (2002, p. 3) uses the analogy of a small boat on a big ocean to describe a developing country entering the free-market. To quote, “the small boat without proper equipment is ill prepared to withstand the storms of the open sea, nor is it able to withstand the force of a big wave hitting it broadside”. The crew is untrained and ill prepared for the journey and therefore at the mercy of the ocean, which is wild and unpredictable. Like the small boat in the analogy, poorer countries are more vulnerable to the erratic and volatile nature of global markets. They can suffer economic and social disruption as well as the destruction of potentially viable

domestic companies. Financial crisis can lead to increased borrowing from the IMF but borrowing comes with strict external controls and creating a budget surplus becomes mandatory. The IMF is therefore able to impose austerity cuts to increase surplus, and cuts in services such as health and education programs result, as they are seen as 'soft targets' as Barry Eichengreen (2002, p. 3), a former adviser to the IMF, concurs.

The analogy is vivid and disturbing and many believe SAPs have contributed to what some describe as development's 'greatest failure', sub-Saharan Africa. Hoppers (2001, p. 25), from South Africa, contends that the "inescapable" conditions that come with SAPs reduce a weakened state's ability to respond to internal problems and have led, in the case of sub-Saharan Africa, to the decline in adult literacy, fewer children attending school, the gender gap widening and low teacher morale. An Oxfam International research paper (*Aid & education: the squandered opportunity* (Oxfam Briefing) 2000) also pointed out the debilitating effects of IMF policies and programs in sub-Saharan Africa, the world's poorest region. Of 16 countries in sub-Saharan Africa undergoing IMF programs during the 1990s, 12 cut spending in education at a time when there were 47 million children out of school in the region. In East Asia in the 1980s, the report claims, IMF SAP programs prolonged and deepened the recession in the early 1980s, placing 20 million people below the poverty line and 20 million children out of school. In Thailand, the school drop-out rate in 1998 increased three fold after IMF intervention and in Brazil there has been a 25% decline in spending on early education programs under SAPs. Stiglitz (2002) argues that IMF programs and policies were major contributing factors to the social and economic declines in these countries during the late 1990s. Given this history it is little wonder that in Timor-Leste in 2002, representatives from several NGOs met with representatives of the World Bank and IMF to express their serious concerns over the involvement of both institutions in Timor-Leste (*Report from one-day seminar on East Timor Joining the International Financial Institutions* 2002).

As their roles changed the World Bank and the IMF have often been criticised for being too influenced in their economic policies by wealthy western nations. This criticism appears to have some validity when the voting structure of the fund is examined. The voting system for both institutions is similar and based on financial quotas paid by members. Member countries pay a percentage of their GNP and those paying the highest percentage get the highest proportion of votes. The

obvious consequence of this system is that poorer nations have very little power over how the fund operates and its loan conditions. Another consequence is that poorer countries, which are the most likely to be heavy borrowers, but who do not 'toe the line', risk having not only IMF funds withdrawn but other aid and investment withheld (Watkins 1999). To be a borrower from the World Bank a country must be first a member of the IMF.

The IMF (*Globalisation :Threat or Opportunity?* 2001), while accepting that poverty has increased and the gap between rich and poor countries and between peoples has widened, points to overall figures showing unprecedented growth in many areas. It also points to the many advantages that outward-orientated policies bring to an economy. By contrast it claims those countries in Latin America and Africa which have retained inward-orientated policies have suffered the economic consequences of those policies.

#### **4.8 Humanitarian Intervention in Fragile States and Emergency Situations**

While development theorists might debate the pluses and minuses of the free-market neoliberal economic structure of development, few dispute that the model was developed in the West, by Western architects, and is controlled by institutions where the Western countries have the majority vote. While the IMF and World Bank are only part of the apparatus of development, they nevertheless have far reaching influence that goes beyond economic and financial management. As the discussion so far has revealed, development is not simply an economic model or a series of processes, it has specific targets and goals and embedded ideologies, knowledge and truths which inform the way its major institutions govern themselves and others. As has also been shown that small and fragile states are the most vulnerable and least able to protect themselves.

One of the main arms of the United Nations is the Security Council and it is through the Security Council that interventions on security or humanitarian grounds can be made. Global and regional security is of primary concern and a range of interventions may be taken depending on the circumstances and the nature of the incident or issue. In emergency situations forces and aid can be deployed quickly and dramatically. In 1999 when the UN Security Council authorised an intervention in Timor-Leste a peace keeping force from 23 countries, led by Australian forces, entered Timor-Leste to stop the bloodshed, they did so backed by a long history of global development and intervention.



## **Deconstructing and Reconstructing the Discourse of Development**

Post-development theory is important to my research for several reasons. Firstly, it offers a way of deconstructing and reconstructing development as discourse and practice which allows us to understand how the 'apparatus of development' functions and changes as it perpetuates itself. Secondly, it opens up, through its application of Foucault's approach to power, that manifests as 'rationalities' or techniques of governance, a way of critically analysing the development apparatus constructively, without necessarily seeing it as negative or repressive. For those immersed in the field, particularly Western aid practitioners (and in this group I include myself), it provides a mechanism for consciously evaluating their own role within the context of development, as instruments of the apparatus.

### **4.9 Post-development and its Critics**

Post-development is the term often used to describe the theories of a group of authors critical of the dominant model of development practiced since WWII (Nustad 2001). In describing the commonalities between post-development writers, Nustad (2001, p. 480) notes that most are inspired in various ways by the work of Foucault and tend to see development as a discourse that orders and creates the object that it pertains to address in this case the under-developed or the 'Third World'. Post - development writers are often criticised for not offering an alternative to development while at the same time calling for it to be abandoned (see Ferguson 2005; Nederveen Pieterse 2000). However Nustad (2001, p. 479) argues that this is not a good enough reason to dismiss post-development theorists as they provide a valuable way of critiquing development. Whether or not they agree with the theories espoused by post-development writers or its more extreme call for the total abandonment of development, many writers use post-development analysis as a starting or departure point for their own exploration of development issues (see McGregor 2007; Matthews 2004; Curry 2003; Brigg 2002).

As Nustad notes, the work of Foucault does indeed seem fundamental to post-development writers, particularly those from the 'South', who see his work as a liberating pathway out of a development world which was to them all pervasive. One of post-developments most noted writers Arturo Escobar, in his 1987, dissertation titled *Power and Visibility: The Invention and Management of Development*, describes the frustration felt by those in the South who were confronted with what they saw as the failures of development all around them, yet were helpless to challenge it. They felt enclosed within a world where development defined reality

and from which “there was no way out” (p. 7). Development had not only “coloni[z]ed reality” but had “become reality” (p. 7). It was not until Escobar, in his own words, started to think around the term ‘discourse’ that he began to understand how “a mode of thought” can become dominant and how reality gets “filled” with something in such a way that all other possible ways of thinking are excluded (p. 8). Escobar’s reading of Foucault’s work in his text *The Archaeology of Knowledge and The Order of Things* was fundamental to this new way of thinking and understanding and in his own words enabled him at last to place himself outside and begin to “explore productively the predicament of development” (p. 9).

To examine development as discourse requires an analysis of why they [the peoples of Asia, Africa, and Latin America] came to see themselves as undeveloped, how the achievement of ‘development’ came to be seen as a fundamental problem, and how it was made real through the deployment of a myriad of strategies and programs. (Escobar 2005, p. 342)

Escobar’s analysis of development as discourse is much wider than understanding how it is historically and ideologically constructed. It also demands to know how the discourse functions particularly in regard to those in the ‘Third World’ who came to see themselves as ‘underdeveloped’.

Post-development writers are not the only group critical of development. Post-structuralists and postmodernists, although not addressed in this thesis, also provide valuable insights. However, for me, it is the post-development writers that really ‘shake us up’ and make us look at what is in front of us in new ways. Though post-development writers may not have succeeded in their call for the ‘end of development’, they do ensure that for those who read their work, whether sympathetically or critically, that ‘development’ can never again exist in quite the same form. By its very resistance to the discourses of development, post-development writing has not only informed modern discourse of development but has become an integral part of it. In doing so, post-development writing provokes us to ask new questions about the apparatus of development in terms of knowledge formation, power relationships normalisation and problematisation processes. It provides us with a mechanism for stepping outside the development world. Most importantly for me, post-development writers introduce us to the work of Foucault, often acclaimed as the departure point for post-development writers. By doing this they open a door to new ways of understanding how the apparatus of development operates as both a discourse and as an integrated system of state intervention, and

how it exerts power and change in a seemingly benign way and without apparent political interference.

#### **4.10 Foucault, Power and Government**

The study of power in general, according to Foucault, should focus on “the total structure of actions brought to bear on the actions of others in particular cases, and of the resistances and evasions encountered by those actions” (Hindess 1996, p. 101). In relation to Foucault’s understanding of power as a structure of actions, Hindess states that, “power in this sense is manifested in the instruments, techniques and procedures that may be brought to bear on the actions of others” (Hindess 1996, p. 100). Foucault’s analysis of power, Hindess continues, moves away from the obsession with questions of sovereignty and legitimacy that other analyses of modern political power have focused on, and refines it to three specific relationships: strategic games between liberties [power in general], domination [unequal power relationships] and government (conduct of conduct) (Hindess 1996, p. 101). By separating power in this way we can move away from evaluating power as legitimate or not legitimate, negative or positive, productive or unproductive and can focus on how it is applied and the effects of its application.

This movement away from the notion of power as essentially negative is in itself a liberating factor for those submerged in the field and working for international aid agencies as it allows critical examination of institutional and individual action without necessarily laying blame. However, it is ‘government’ as a power relationship that is of most interest to my study in Timor-Leste, particularly in the sense of it lying, as Hindess (1996, p. 97) outlines, “between domination and those relationships of power which are reversible. It is the conduct of conduct, aiming to affect the actions of individuals by working on their conduct, that is, on the ways in which they regulate their own behaviour”. This understanding of power is for me the key to understanding the power relationships that operate between the development apparatus, the state and civil society in Timor-Leste.

#### **4.11 Liberalism as a Rationality of Government**

To get a better understanding of the “use and invention of the technologies for the regulation of conduct” (Hindess 1996, p. 106) and to see how and why they have become part of the operating system of the development apparatus, further exploration of Foucault’s breakdown of government into three specific spheres is needed. To do this I turn again to Hindess (1996) and his reading of Foucault. He reminds us firstly that when Foucault speaks of government it is not simply in the

sense of a sovereign institution or body exerting power or control over its subjects but the way we might govern ourselves, our family and our relationships: how we might conduct our own behaviour and seek to influence the conduct or behaviour of others. In this sense within the context of the aid world, individual aid practitioners, as the human face of aid, as well as institutions and organisations, are culpable for the conduct of conduct within a foreign country. Foucault, according to Hindess (1996, p. 98), separates government into three specific rationalities, discipline, pastoral power and liberalism, which he regards as having been particularly influential in the development of the modern state. The first rationality, 'discipline', is a form of government exerted on individuals or groups to "provide them with particular skills and attributes to develop their capacity for self-control", to ensure their compliance to group activities and "to render them amenable to instruction" and check quotation marks to mould their characters in other ways". Exertion of this type of power is often exemplified in schools, prisons and similar institutions. Foucault insists, notes Hindess, that, like power in general, discipline can be productive and is not necessarily regressive or negative (Hindess 1996, p. 113).

The second rationality, pastoral power/government, is best understood according to Foucault, as described by Hindess, through the metaphor of the shepherd and the flock. It is a style of government that promotes governance through the detailed regulation and policing of society for the 'benefit' of society and is more concerned with the overall welfare of the population than with individual freedom. The shepherd as leader is imbued with superior power which allows an individual to make decisions for the good of the flock (population) without the need for consent (p. 118-119).

The third rationality is liberalism and it differs dramatically from the other two types of government. In Foucault's view, liberalism ceases to be simply a political doctrine or ideology espousing individual freedom and instead becomes a distinctive rationality of government. Liberal government must at the same time create the conditions in which individual freedoms can be assured without appearing to threaten or limit individual liberty and freedoms. It does this by governing "at a distance" and securing the means by which individuals believe themselves to be self-governing.

In the post-conflict world of reconstruction and development in Timor-Leste all three rationalities of governance can be observed. This is a result of the volatility of the present situation in Timor-Leste and in particular the legacy of colonialism and

occupation, the embedded notions of elitism in the actions and attitudes of some of the returning Timor-Leste diaspora and some of the international agency staff, and the underlying traditional ruling system in the villages and districts.

I argue, however, it is liberalism that gives the best insight into how the aid world operates within an intervention context. When the aid world moves into an emergency environment, its entry is legitimised by the United Nations through the Security Council, which has overridden the sovereignty of the state because of 'special' circumstances. In doing so, it usually takes temporary control of government until democratic elections can be held (in the case of Timor-Leste this took two years). However, unlike well established liberal democracies where the population has been indoctrinated since birth into a belief in 'government for the people by the people', the countries where these interventions take place are characteristically not based on western democratic principles but have been subject to civil unrest and long-term conflict. In these situations the population must be 'trained' to understand and value democracy and how to act 'democratically'. As Matthews (2004, p. 380) contends, "a project premised upon a set of values cannot succeed in the absence of those values". This process of enculturation must be achieved not by force or open coercion but as Rita Abrahamsen (2004) notes, through "promises of incorporation and inclusion", and by creating a "shared conceptualisation of power" (p. 1454) whereby all players believe they are equal and able to influence decision-making and actions.

In humanitarian interventions, such as in Timor-Leste, liberal governance, thus becomes an attractive and legitimate way of 'conducting conduct' for those sent to restore order and to 'reconstruct a Nation'. To this end much time and money is invested in civic education to bring the population to an understanding of how they will participate in governing themselves from here on. This education process is vitally important to the overall process as the Timor-Leste United Nations Development Assistance Framework (2003-2005) explains when describing the development setting, Timor-Leste is experiencing a "new form of (democratic) governance which has no historical or cultural roots in Timor-Leste" (*East Timor: United Nations Development Assistance Framework (2003-2004)* n.d., p. 1).

Time and money is also spent in capacity building new government members, bureaucrats, NGOs and civil society organisations in the art of 'good governance' and 'partnerships', the new terms for the arrangements and relationships between the aid industry and these bodies and the means by which they will be governed.

Under the rubric of partnerships and good governance falls the ever increasing modern lexicon of development, which includes such terms as participation, inclusivity, transparency, accountability, equity, consensus, community empowerment, local ownership, and bottom-up decision making. These are all powerful and evocative terms that appear to embrace equality and celebrate grass roots participation and decision-making.

Indeed, the aid industry has embraced and utilised the language so convincingly that, as Macgregor (2007) observes in citing a World Bank document describing the Bank's Community Empowerment Project, that the description [not to mention the title] could be mistaken as a quote from "some radical grassroots NGO or fringe alternative community organisation" (p. 155). Ironically, it could also be argued, in reading the literature, that it is a language that could have been appropriated from post-development discourse itself. Nevertheless, it embeds itself in the psyche of a new nation and in the psyche of the aid practitioners who are often its message carriers. As Cornwall and Brock (2005) observe in a critical examination at the current 'buzzwords' in development, "barely any development actor could seriously take issue with the way in which the objectives of development are currently framed" (p. 1043).

#### **4.12 The Art of Appropriation**

O'Malley (1998) gives a more detailed understanding of how and why liberal government is attracted to and needs to appropriate the language and approaches of "indigenous governances" (p.158). Liberalism, he argues, is "a regime which maximises the freedoms of the subject" or at least gives the impression that there is a minimal undermining of individual freedoms, and is therefore attracted to the approaches of "indigenous governances, the forms of government that arise in, and are endemic to, the everyday lives of subjects" (1998 p.158). Governing in this way, he maintains, is more likely to appear, to both the ruler and the ruled, as originating from within, rather than being imposed externally. As an example, he uses advanced liberalism's appropriation of the word 'community' as a means of locating rule within the everyday lives of individuals. "Community policing' and community enterprises may be thought of as the strategic enlistment or alignment of indigenous organisation into a governmental program, in order to govern a problem which cannot be left entirely to the management of individuals" (O'Malley 1998, citing O'Malley & Palmer 1996). This alignment process allows communities to believe

that they are in fact in control and exerting rule while the “formal, exogenous imposed government” appears to be taking a back step.

#### **4.13 Fighting a Faceless Tiger**

Foucault’s notion of liberalism as a rationality of governance is used in this thesis as a mechanism for firstly, interpreting the gap between rhetoric and practice in the post-conflict world of aid and development. That is, why it exists and the reason why the gap fails to close. And secondly, for examining how local NGOs get caught in the gap and can become the scapegoat for development’s failures. Foucault’s understanding of liberal governance allows us to put a face to the tiger. The tiger in this analogy is not necessarily destructive but is certainly powerful and shrewd. In the ‘old days’ the SAP programs could be pointed to as a concrete example of development’s failure and how destructive neo-liberal economic policies could be. However, the aid industry in reinventing itself, such as by “abandoning SAPs in favour of partnerships” (Abrahamsen 2004, p.1453), has subsumed its opposition and taken its language. To make criticism of it then, almost becomes a criticism of self. Local NGOs, whose language it most appropriates, can be further disempowered as the onus of responsibility for its practice devolves to them. How can local NGOs, particularly those in post-conflict situations who are accustomed to meeting their adversaries face-to-face, oppose a benign regime that espouses community participation and consultation, bottom-up decision making, equal partnerships? Is this not what they believe in and stand for? Is this not the way to involve communities in decision making? Is this not their bailiwick? The issue is further complicated because the tiger in fact does have a face – the thousands of mostly well meaning international aid workers (like myself) who do the tiger’s work smoothing the rough.

These questions lead us to a further exploration of NGOs in the aid and development context and a careful examination of the complex set of relationships that exist between local NGOs and the international aid world and analysis of how the language of development informs those relationships.

### **NGOs in Development**

#### **4.14 Defining NGOs**

Under the umbrella term of NGOs, increasingly referred to as the Third sector (Hemment 2004; Fowler 1997) in contrast to the first sector (government) and the second sector (private enterprise), lies an extensive range of non-governmental, not



for profit organisations both international and local, secular and non-secular. In development terms international NGOs are usually seen as originating in the North, the 'developed world', while local NGOs are seen as coming from the South, or the 'Third World'. Southern NGOs are also commonly known as local NGOs, grassroots organisations, indigenous organisations, community-based organisations (CBOs) and civil society organisations (CSOs).

Within the literature on international development the definition of NGOs is as wide and as various as the names by which they are known. Aubrey (1997) comments that the act of defining NGOs is not only difficult but contentious and warns of the risk of 'Southern' NGOs being defined by academics and aid practitioners simply as 'mimicking' Northern NGOs, without recognising that the greater number of local NGOs have origins within their own country. Bebbington (2004, p. 740), on a different note, suggests that rather than trying to define NGOs we enquire how and why an NGO exists and for what and for whose purpose they originate.

Much has been written about the role and purpose of NGOs in development (see (Bebbington 2004; Momsen 2002; Sundstrom 2002; Markowitz 2001; Abramson 1999; Smillie 1997). Holmen & Jirstrom (1994, p. 7), while remaining unconvinced themselves, stated that those on both sides of the political divide were beginning to see local NGOs as a "panacea for development". What they questionably termed the 'new' approach to development was seen to replace the 'old' practice of development projects dominated by 'experts', presumably from the West. Local NGOs were seen as a way of empowering and including 'the poor' without really having to deal directly with them (p. 16). At the same time post-development writers, particularly those from the Third World, were hailing grassroots and localised movements as a serious alternative to development (1992, p. 27). Markowitz (2001) notes that they are widely viewed within the literature as flexible innovators who are able to promote local participation and engage the poor, while Aubey (1997) sums up the literature by saying that at best local NGOs are seen as advocates of self-reliance who can bring about policy and institutional change while at worst they are seen as conduits through which foreign donors exert influence.

Regardless of the terminology, definition and discussion on the pros and cons of NGOs in development, a close relationship has developed between international (Northern) and local NGOs (Southern). It appears that the growth and work of each group is contingent, in many ways, upon the other (like a co-dependent relationship). In terms of the history of NGOs, both Northern and Southern, the



numbers involved in Third World development increased dramatically in the 1980s (Fowler 1997). This dramatic increase, Fowler (1997) argues, occurred at the same time the amount of Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) channelled through international NGOs also increased. International NGOs were progressively being used by bilateral (donor government aid agencies) and multilateral agencies (such as UNESCO, UNICEF, ILO, IOM, FAO), within foreign countries to dispense aid, often through local NGOs, as a means of circumnavigating weak government structures in targeted countries and ensuring the growth of the Third sector, in those countries (1997).

This funding shift had serious implications for the international organisations and for their local NGO ‘partners’. By increasing dramatically the amount of income derived from government and multilateral sources, the autonomy of international NGOs was threatened. This increased dependency on government funding in turn had an impact on their local NGO ‘partners’ who, unaware of the connection to bilateral and multilateral agencies, were also unaware of the conditionalities that accompanied the assistance (Fowler 1997, p. 32). Fowler contends that the trend continues today as international NGOs are more than ever in danger of becoming “quasi-governmental” organisations and local NGOs entering into partnerships with them are more vulnerable to manipulation through hidden agendas.

#### **4.15 Legitimacy**

In the twenty-first century local NGOs continue to be an essential cog in the development wheel, even more so in post-conflict emergencies where aid must be disbursed quickly and efficiently to local communities in need. Bilateral, multilateral and aid organisations charged with the disbursement on behalf of governments and private donors scramble to attract local groups through which they can work. There is in this undignified scramble issues relating to legitimacy which Fowler (1997, p. 37) refers to as development’s “forgotten element”. Aid on the ground must be seen to be achieving its goal in order to attract further funding and to justify the huge expense of public and private money. Attachments or partnerships with local NGOs are therefore an essential part of establishing legitimacy.

#### **4.16 Partnerships or Dependency**

As already mentioned above, the term ‘development partnerships’ is increasingly being used to define the relationship between, the aid world and recipient countries and their agencies at all levels (2004). Not only do multilateral and bilateral agencies enter into partnership relationships with recipient governments but as with

international aid organisations, they also enter into partnerships with local NGOs. The question here is what does 'partnership' mean? While the term itself implies sharing on equal terms and consensus decision making, there is an argument that it is simply conditionality in another form (Abrahamsen 2004) and there is much for local NGOs to be wary of in entering into these types of relationships. As Fowler (1997) has pointed out, the agenda's of some international agencies are not always open and transparent to a local NGO, while Abrahamsen (2004) questions altogether the genuineness of a partnership where "one party is in possession of the purse and the other the begging bowl" (p. 1454).

Thus, it could be argued that these development partnerships are one-sided and based upon unequal relationships where the partner with the money holds the power. However, this is not the full picture. As pointed out above, international agencies and aid organisations are reliant in many ways on local NGOs to legitimise their existence as humanitarian organisations. They rely on local organisations to link them with, and to implement their aid strategies for, the poor, the unemployed, and the disabled. Local NGOs also are not helpless victims of the partnerships but are capable, in many instances, of managing partnerships to their own advantage and to the advantage of their clients. In many instances the partnerships are successful, and are based on trust and respect and exemplify the language that describes them.

#### **4.17 Conclusion**

This chapter has provided a brief historical outline of aid and development and the theoretical framework used in this thesis. I have argued that a post-development theoretical framework is particularly relevant to my ethnographic examination and analysis of KBH for it provides a means to apply Foucault's approach to critically analyse the aid industry and development efforts without necessarily seeing it as negative or repressive. More specifically, as I have outlined in this chapter, I am interested in exploring Foucault's theory of liberalism as a rationality or technique of governance for understanding the complex set of relationships that operate between the state, the development apparatus, and civil society (NGOs), in the aid and reconstruction context and how this theory informs the language of development.

While a local NGO in a post-conflict environment may appear to act and operate at a local level within its own constituency, it is nevertheless influenced by relationships outside that sphere. To understand, therefore, the challenges and issues a local NGO faces in a post-conflict environment dominated by the aid industry one must

understand how a local NGO is tied to the external world through international development partnerships, and the attached responsibilities and conditions that go with them, as well as how these relationships are governed.

The previous chapter gave a picture of local NGOs within the context of Timor-Leste, and this chapter placed local NGOs within a much wider picture. Now that the local and global scenes have been set, the next chapter introduces KBH and describes its history, and how it goes about its business, on the ground, in Timor-Leste.

## **Chapter Five**

### **Knua Buka Hatene (Place for Learning/Knowing)**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter introduces Knua Buka Hatene (KBH), a small independent vocational training and support centre situated close to the centre of Dili, the capital of Timor-Leste. The first section of the chapter addresses the first objective of the thesis by describing the history of KBH's foundation and its vision, mission, objectives, ideological underpinnings, and values and beliefs, in order to understand how these elements have shaped and continue to shape the work and structure of the organisation.

The second part of the chapter covers the period from the beginning of my placement in early May 2004, to the end of July 2005. It is an ethnographic description and introduces KBH from a different perspective - as a place, and as a small local NGO operating on an everyday basis as distinct from its operations and values as described in its official documents. It also introduces the people who work for KBH and those who are closely associated with it – their relationships with each other and to the organisation. Finally, it describes the changes KBH made and the challenges it faced in adapting to the changing aid environment as it transitioned from post-emergency recovery to long-term development. It also begins to address the second objective of the thesis by describing some of the interactions and experiences between KBH and the aid industry beyond its interactions and relationship with APHEDA, its major international partner and donor.

#### **KBH 2001-2004**

#### **5.2 Establishment and Ideological Underpinnings**

KBH was established formally on 24, October 2001, by three local NGOs: Sahe Institute for Liberation (SIL), Grupo Feto Foin Sae Timor Lorosa'e (GFFTL) and the Labour Advocacy Institute of Timor-Leste (LAIFET) with the assistance of APHEDA-Union Aid Abroad<sup>23</sup>, an Australian international aid organisation. APHEDA had been a solidarity<sup>24</sup> partner of Timor-Leste through its support of the Conselho Nacional de Resistencia Timorese (CNRT) for many years prior to 1999.

In late 1999, shortly after the independence vote, APHEDA sent a representative, Ramona Matussis, to Timor-Leste to support local NGOs to re-group after the

violence and destruction. At this stage local groups, as described by Matussis (Parker 2008), were mostly unfunded and staffed by volunteers who were trying to sort out what they were going to do on top of re-establishing their own traumatised lives. It was the job of Matussis to identify groups and to assist them with resources and in locating accommodation from which they could work. GFFTL, SIL and LAIFET were three of the groups Matussis worked with during that time. While the three organisations were drawn together by a shared ideology and a focus on education and training as a means of liberation and independence for their country, they lacked the facilities and resources to implement their training plans. APHEDA, with its own roots in unionism and solidarity, and an aid and development history in vocational education and training support, was a sympathetic and legitimate partner. APHEDA also had the funds and support of the Australian union movement to rent and rehabilitate a building to be used as a training venue. SIL, GFFTL and LAIFET, while each maintaining their identity as autonomous organisations, established KBH as a joint organisation for training, with the help of APHEDA.

In establishing KBH as a separate organisation, a new organisation with its own constitution, board of management, vision, mission, aims and objectives was established. This type of organisational structure followed a model conducive to attracting funding from bilateral, multilateral and international aid organisations<sup>25</sup> while also ensuring, as much as possible, local autonomy through the board of management made up of members from the three founding groups, SIL, GFFTL and LAIFET.

The deep rooted socialist democratic philosophy and ideology of all three groups underpinned KBH's aims, objectives, vision and mission and are encapsulated in KBH's broad vision statement which is: to create social order in Timor-Leste based on equality, justice, solidarity, prosperity, and progress. These principles are also embodied in KBH's mission statement which is to: develop participatory community education; increase the capacity of the community towards self sufficiency and sustainability; encourage cultural development; provide education for community organising activists; and provide a place for activities in accordance with the vision of KBH.

The teaching methodology of KBH also reflected that of the three founding organisations, grounded as it was in popular and liberation models of education that came from both Central America and South Africa (interview with Chairperson of Board). The emphasis was on community participation and experimental methods of

adult learning known as ‘popular education methodology’ (*Knua Buka Hatene Constitution* n.d.).

### **5.3 The Founding Organisations**

While KBH could be classified as a local NGO that developed in a response to the emergency and post-emergency conditions in Timor-Leste post-independence, its founding organisations have a longer history and have been operating in Timor-Leste since the late 1990s. Of the group of three, the most well known is SIL. To appreciate their role in shaping the ideology and practices of KBH, each founding organisation is briefly described below.

#### ***SIL***

SIL started as Sa’he Study Club at the end of 1998. The focus of the club was on “the development of ideas and practices of national liberation that involved all aspects of life” (KBH doc). SIL developed into an NGO in 1999 to assist with the country’s recovery, focusing on agricultural training for independence and sustainability, community education for liberation, and community activist organising. SIL continues to be a leading local voice in Timor-Leste and is often critical of government and aid practice. It publishes a monthly newsletter and a four-monthly journal, as well as books on alternative developments regarding neo-liberalism. For example, SIL was one of three local organisations involved in a discussion group with the World Bank and IMF (*Report from one-day seminar on East Timor Joining the International Financial Institutions* 2002) about their role in Timor-Leste. SIL presented a critical view of the World Bank’s interventions in African and South American countries during the workshop and apposed similar style interventions in Timor-Leste.

#### ***LAIFET***

The Labour Advocacy Institute of Timor-Leste (LAIFET) was founded in October 1999, with a commitment to labour rights in Timor-Leste and assisting and empowering small business enterprises in the districts. LAIFET’s activities have included advocacy on workers’ rights, small enterprise development and empowerment through small business management training programs of small business enterprises or cooperatives. LAIFET also established several small carpentry and blacksmithing cooperatives in 13 districts and many of the people from these collectives received training through KBH.

## **GFFTL**

The third organisation, GFFTL, is predominantly a women's organisation and was founded in October 1989. GFFTL was a foundation member of the Students Solidarity Council pre-1999. In 2001, it became independent from the Council. The main focus of GFFTL is campaigning for literacy for Timor-Leste people with a focus on women and children. Its main activities include literacy learning, sewing and sustainable agriculture training with a particular focus on women and children. GFFTL relies heavily on volunteers, mostly female university students, who travel around the districts providing literacy training (Tetun) to targeted communities. The vocational training is usually done in collaboration with KBH with participants coming in from the districts for training at the KBH building.

### **5.4 KBH Purpose**

The three founding organisations had a very clear idea of the purpose of KBH as both an organisation and a training venue. It was envisaged by the groups that the building itself would provide a physical and central place for Sa'he, GFFTL and LAIFET to conduct training together with KBH as the implementing partner, or independently, and would act as a central resource for all the groups. KBH as an organisation could develop training in its own right as well as establish training methods and resources for groups and communities according to the vision, mission and objectives of KBH. The building would also provide a space for outside groups for activities including meetings, workshops, training sessions, and conferences, on the provision that the philosophy of these groups was in line with KBH's vision and mission.

### **5.5 KBH Structure**

The structure of KBH was established so the founding partners would steer and direct KBH. The management of KBH, through the coordinator, was directly accountable to the Board. APHEDA and other donor/sponsor organisations were invited to attend Board meetings but did not have voting powers. Board meetings were originally held approximately every two weeks, then on a monthly basis until 2004 (*Knua Buka Hatene Constitution* n.d.). It was envisaged by the Board that when a partner (founding) organisation took on a particular training project, KBH would work closely with the particular partner organisation to propose, implement, monitor and evaluate the project. It was also expected that when KBH conducted its own training it would employ the trainers from GFFTL, SIL or LAIFET.

## **5.6 Building Rehabilitation and Habitation**

When KBH was established in early 2001, the first year of its existence was focused on renovating the KBH building and site (funded by APHEDA). The building, like most buildings in Dili after the 1999 violence and destruction, had suffered severe damage. The rehabilitation project was funded and supported by the CFMEU (Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union of Australia) and APHEDA. The building and land were leased in 2001 from the Transitional Authority for Timor-Leste (TAFET), and after 2002, on a long term lease from the elected government of Timor-Leste. In a city where few buildings were left habitable, the building was a valuable and useful asset for all three founding groups.

## **5.7 Funding**

In April 2002 KBH received operational funding for a two-year period from APHEDA, partially from donations from union members and through the AusAID Capacity Building Project in Timor-Leste (CAPET). This enabled the organisation to pay the salaries of the coordinator, administrative assistant, security and cleaning staff, as well as to fund the maintenance and fuel for two motorbikes and to cover costs for stationery and the rental charges on the building for two years. The two-year period ended in March 2004 but was extended a further six months to September 2004.

Funding for the purchase of office equipment and two motorbikes was provided by Oxfam Hong Kong. This international organisation also provided funding for an international consultant to work with the coordinator of KBH to establish administrative systems and provide capacity building to the coordinator and administration assistant in office management and information technology for a one-year period.

Several international APHEDA-placed volunteer vocational training advisers also worked with KBH from 2002 to 2004 for periods of six to twelve months. All had the task of building the capacity of KBH and partner staff in leadership, administration, financial management and project implementation. From 2002-2004 many other international volunteers also worked with KBH on short-term training and capacity building projects.

## **5.8 Projects, Client Communities and Collaborative Training**

Funded by APHEDA and to a lesser extent other international donors, KBH ran projects from 2001 to 2004 independently or in collaboration with one of the founding organisations. These projects had a focus on giving people the required



skills and knowledge to increase their capacity to become economically independent. This type of training was very much in line with KBH's philosophy of liberation and independence for all through education. There was a grave concern among many of the members of SIL, GFFTL and LAIFET that Timorese had lost their capacity to be independent. As the Chairperson of KBH explained, "many sustainable agricultural methods used by farmers in the past had been lost during the Indonesian occupation and during the emergency period following the vote the UN had provided many people with emergency supplies and [a] dependence on hand-outs had been developed". One of KBH's original beliefs and main tasks was to help people be more self-reliant and in control of their own future through enabling them to meet their own basic needs. The focus therefore was on sustainable agricultural-based training (from interview with KBH chairperson) as the majority of Timorese are agrarian based. Similar philosophical underpinnings for re-establishing and building people's self-reliance can be found in several training programs conducted by KBH as described below.

### ***Plough making***

Plough making and organic fertiliser training were examples of the types of training KBH engaged in with their partners which exemplified the objectives outlined above. Initial assessment of the farmers' groups indicated that they did not know how to make a simple plough and wanted to learn these skills because they felt it would be important for self-sufficiency and would improve their farm management practices (KBH evaluation document year, 2004). The plough was a simple design, required no petrol, as did tractors and rotary hoes and could be used in a variety of terrains. The project ran for six weeks and consisted of a five-day plough-making course. In total, 150 people received training through this project. They were able to take home the ploughs they made during the training and many continue to use them.

### ***Organic fertiliser training***

The objective of this training was to train male and female farmers in the making and use of three types of organic fertiliser so they could improve their own self reliance rather than be dependent on expensive chemical fertilisers introduced in Indonesian times. Courses were given initially in four districts, using the central meeting place in each community for the training. As many of the farmers were illiterate, the course used practical skills and coaching techniques for assisting participants through the process of making different types of fertiliser. At the end of the course, participants from the different farmers' groups had the knowledge and skills to build three

different working models of composting installations, including the construction and maintenance of a composting toilet. In addition, participants were given a simple pictorial manual in Indonesian for future reference. In each farmer's group approximately 20 persons participated. In over ten further training sessions 220 farmers were trained (Plate 5.1).



**Plate 5.1 Organic composting training**

It is hard to gauge how effective these types of programs were in the long term, given the time constraints of this research but in the short-term they appeared to meet their objectives by giving farmers new subsistence strategies through introducing new techniques and by re-establishing old methods lost during occupation.

### ***Training of trainers***

Carpentry, blacksmithing and sewing collectives from 13 districts were also trained using similar methods and by using the Training of Trainers (ToT) method. The ToT training involved the coordinator of each collective coming in to KBH for an intensive training block of two to four weeks. After completing the course in either sewing, blacksmithing or carpentry, the coordinator or nominated collective representative would return to the district to train the members of their collective in the newly acquired skills and knowledge. ToT is a rapid, and initially cost effective method, for getting training out to people in a short time, particularly to those living in remote

locations. However, in the long-term it relies for its success on regular and on-going support, monitoring and evaluation to ensure that skills and knowledge are being transferred in a productive way from trainer to participants. The long-term nature of this type of support is not normally reflected in the funding allocations of donors and nor are the difficulties faced in providing long-term support understood by most donors. The scenario in Box 5.1 gives a realistic outline of what is involved in providing on-going support to remote area communities for a small NGO.

**Box 5-1 The reality of representing and serving client communities**

KBH implemented training in two ways, either by bringing participants from the districts to Dili for training in blocks of two to four weeks or sending trainers to the districts to conduct training on site. In either situation, community consultations, as well as follow up activities including monitoring and evaluation were required, involving a great deal of travel by KBH staff. KBH staff managed travel by taking local transport, going by motorbike, or when it involved several staff and training materials, the APHEDA Troop Carrier was borrowed or hired. This vehicle is a very old four-wheel drive with bench seats in the back, bad springs and open windows for air conditioning. On other occasions a mikrolet, similar to a mini bus, would be hired, but this depended on the state of the roads and the weather at the time, as flooding and mud slides made some places inaccessible by anything other than a four-wheel drive vehicle. Communication with outlying villages was also difficult. In some instances, to let the village group know of an impending visit, a KBH staff member would visit one of the markets in Dili to find someone from the village who could be relied upon to take a message to the village. The meeting date would be determined by how long the message would take to get there, and the season, as this dictated the agricultural tasks of the village and the time the group had to spare for meetings.

The usual pattern for an evaluation, monitoring or training visit was to load all the equipment, bedding, and bags of rice into the truck or mikrolet and set off as early in the morning as possible, stopping on the way to buy bananas, firewood or other goods deemed necessary for the journey. While each paid staff member was eligible for a per diem, it usually was not enough to cover accommodation costs, even if it were available, and the staff would rely on sleeping on the floor of a relative/friend/community group and providing the firewood and food for themselves as well as their hosts. The mountainous, winding, often badly potholed, roads in Timor made travelling to relatively close villages difficult. A 120 km journey in Timor-Leste could take six hours, while a visit to Oeccusi (Timor-Leste enclave in West Timor), one of the poorest and least serviced places in Timor-Leste and where KBH was involved in several projects, took 14 hours, one way, by ferry.

Continual travel over long periods for staff was often exhausting and debilitating and was one of the subjects often discussed by staff in informal conversations. Going by UN helicopter or by plane was not an option for local NGO workers as it was for many international organisations up until 2004.

## **5.9 Community Education**

While most of KBH's contacts with client communities were made directly through the three founding organisations who predominantly worked in the districts, KBH also independently engaged with the local community in Dili primarily by delivering English language classes and expressional arts training. The English language courses were popular in Dili amongst Timor-Leste who saw increased opportunities for income earning activities for those who could speak English in an environment filled with relatively wealthy English speaking foreigners.

The first English language course that KBH conducted, with the assistance of an international adviser, was targeted at market sellers, mainly women, from the various fresh produce markets in Dili, with the focus on specific language for the market place. A high percentage of women attended this course. Participants of the second course were from various backgrounds including street vendors, young unemployed people, staff of local NGOs generally, and staff of APHEDA's nine partner organisations specifically. These courses were well attended and the majority of the participants wanted to continue their studies in English. One of the outcomes of the project was the establishment of an English Language resource centre within KBH, with books, audio tapes and equipment donations from Australia. It was envisaged that in the future this would be a shared resource centre for those wanting to teach and learn English.

The Expressional Arts Project (EAP) was another type of training that KBH developed independently from SIL, GFFTL and LAIFET, with the support of an international adviser. The project provides young people and adult members of the Timor-Leste Community with the opportunity to participate in alternative and culturally appropriate methods of commentary. These projects invited participation in theatre and dramatic expression training workshops, activities and street theatre production experiences. At the completion of training, participants performed street theatre and stage performances in community locations about community issues. Schools were approached and invited to participate in the project by nominating students to participate in the training. The students' training culminated in a performance to their school community and surrounding communities.

The EAP was one of the most successful projects that KBH ran, in terms of sustainability and longevity, as it delivered a service for clients, mostly international donors and agencies, as well as government departments. These groups would approach KBH with ideas for training and performance on specific topics with target



groups in mind and KBH would design and implement the training, with technical support from the donor relating to the theme covered (Plate 5.2). The range of topics covered included child sexual abuse and exploitation, the importance of breast feeding, and anti-smoking and nutrition awareness education. During the 2006 crisis situation KBH worked with Oxfam and UNICEF to deliver health messages in the IDP (internally displaced persons) camps.



**Plate 5.2 Expressional arts performance by secondary school students in Ermera.**

The EAP while not a priority training area in KBH's initial plan was accepted by the Board as a community empowerment tool. Theatre and drama are major tools in popular education methodology.

As with many local NGOs in Timor-Leste at the time, KBH in conjunction with GFFTL, SIL and LAIFET, was also involved in the massive civic education campaign sponsored by the UN and aimed at preparing people for the democratic elections to be held in 2002.

From November 2001 to November 2004, KBH in collaboration with SIL, GFFTL and LAIFET, and with the help of APHEDA volunteers, international advisers, trained:

- Over 1500 people in 16 vocational areas including carpentry, blacksmithing, tailoring, small business, organic fertiliser production, plough making, vegetable production, agriculture and land care (65 % of trainees were women).
- Over 500 people in areas including expressional arts and literacy.
- Over 1,211 people in civic education.
- A total of 175 people were trained as trainers; among them 17 trainer facilitators within the three member organisations. Another 158 local people with specific skills and knowledge were trained as trainers in vocational skills to work in the districts (of these, 55% were women).
- KBH staff members were also trained in designing training programs, curriculum, evaluation and report writing.

### **5.10 Summary**

In its first two years, KBH, as a local independent training centre with the support and leadership of its founding organisations and APHEDA, was able to fulfil its vision and its mission to serve the needs of its client communities relatively unhampered and in its 'own way'. Its financial dependence on the international world outside APHEDA was limited, and when necessary, was often mediated by an international adviser who could advocate on KBH's behalf. APHEDA, as the major international donor with its base in solidarity and unionism, was a sympathetic international partner/patron supportive of KBH's strong ideology and methodology and that of its founding organisations. While APHEDA received partial funding for its support of KBH (and other NGOs) through AusAID, it was in charge of disbursement of the funds, for the evaluation and monitoring of the projects 'on the ground', and for reporting to AusAID. It acted in some ways as a buffer between KBH and the larger aid community.

In April 2004, however, as the aid environment was shifting from post emergency to long-term development, AusAID's CAPET funding was discontinued and APHEDA was forced, through reduced funds, to re-evaluate its financial support to KBH. While it was not APHEDA's intention to leave KBH unsupported, it nevertheless meant dramatic changes for KBH in the way it functioned and accessed its funds. Thus by mid 2004, KBH was entering a new phase, one that would bring it into much closer contact with the international aid world at large and force it to negotiate

and to develop relationships/partnerships' with a much wider range of international aid organisations and bilateral and multilateral agencies.

The following section describes KBH as it was in April 2004 to August 2005 and the changes it made to its structure and service delivery in response to the changing funding environment.

## **KBH 2004-2006**

### **5.11 Place and Space**

When I first arrived at KBH in April 2004, I had only a vague idea about how the organisation was structured, what it did, how it conducted its community work and training, and only sketchy details of the individuals within the organisation, the Board and the three partner organisations. What little I knew was gleaned from internet sources such as the APHEDA website or the Timor-Leste Action Network (ETAN) site and from the short interviews I conducted two years earlier with several staff members of the three organisations. The KBH coordinator, whom I had spoken with in 2002, had left in 2003 and the new coordinator spoke very little English, and I was not fluent in Indonesian or Tetun. Our email conversations, therefore, were short and spasmodic as KBH's email connection (which was later cut altogether) was slow and expensive and always tenuous, dependent as it was on Dili's fluctuating electricity supply. This meant it took several months of emailing back and forth before things were settled to the point where I could just 'arrive' and negotiate the finer details face-to-face.

While this seemingly endless process might have been frustrating for me, for local people it was just part of the routine and the everyday reality of dealing with yet another foreigner, unable to speak their language, and who has an expectation that things can be done quickly, descending upon them to ask yet more questions and to do yet another study.

Late April is a hot sticky month in Timor, as are most months. The mountains, which rise steeply behind Dili and cover most of Timor and make travel long and arduous between towns and villages (as described in Box 5.1), are already turning brown. Coming out of the wet season, the muddy streets start to dry and the air is filled with dust and dirt stirred up by a multitude of motorbikes and taxis' ferrying people around or sounding their horns to solicit fares from the many foreigners in town. Life has changed dramatically for local people in Dili since the arrival of the aid industry. The cost of living has risen sharply; while streets and roads remain open spaces for

market stalls and social gatherings, and pigs and dogs to wander freely; life goes on in competition with the many fast moving UN trucks and four-wheel drive aid vehicles.

KBH is situated close to the centre of Dili, on the main road from the airport and as such, much of what goes on in Dili goes past its front door, including celebration parades, funeral processions, protests and more volatile demonstrations.

The KBH training centre is a large airy building with trees in front and lots of windows that open out (Plate 5.3). On completion of the renovation in 2002 as described above, the then newly appointed KBH coordinator and administration assistant moved in, occupying one of two offices at the front of the building, GFFTL, with its coordinator, bookkeeper and relatively large volunteer staff of six to ten, mostly female university students, moved into the other. The two offices are connected by a large foyer area where staff, friends and visitors gather in the mornings before work. The big portico at the front of the building, overhanging the tiled steps leading to the entrance, is also a popular and cool place for everyone to sit in the late afternoons or during the many hours when the electricity goes out. Without a fan it is almost impossible to remain inside and oddly enough without computers, work also stops – computers have taken hold of work production in a surprisingly modern way and without them people seem lost.



**Plate 5.3 Knua Buka Hatene, Dili.**

KBH is not only a training centre but a building that can sustain a resident live-in population. Sometimes up to 20 participants at one time would be undergoing



training as well as sleeping, eating, bathing and doing their laundry in the confines of the building. The four training rooms are easily converted into sleeping space at night and the bathrooms double as areas for washing clothes.

As part of the building refurbishment in 2001, a large under-cover area had been created so that large training projects could take place at KBH. In the wet season the under-cover area provided a space to work which was protected from the rain, but in the hotter drier months the concrete floor and walls kept in the heat. It was often a hot and steamy place to work and was particularly utilised for sleeping during training blocks. This area also became an entertainment area, a place for social functions and an occasional game of badminton after work on a Friday night, while the EAP groups often used it as a rehearsal area.

In November 2006, after the crisis situation in April-May of that year (see Chapter 1), the KBH building became a sanctuary for staff. Both the KBH coordinator, whose house had been torched and the GFFTL coordinator and her partner, were too scared to return to their house, were living in the KBH building. The security guard was also living at KBH. Many of the other staff from GFFTL and KBH had sheltered there at various times during the emergency. The building was not merely a training facility but a community centre that could be adapted to meet the changing political environment and the accommodation and safety needs of its occupants.

### **5.12 The KBH Family (Staff)**

At the time of my arrival KBH had only a small salaried staff of five which included the coordinator, the administration assistant, a part-time cleaner, and two part-time security people. Their salaries were all drawn from the small operational budget supplied by APHEDA. There were also two experienced staff from the EAP, who were employed on a contract basis when projects were operating. They often worked for long periods without pay, doing community consultations and preparing proposals. An Australian volunteer adviser was on a six-month placement at KBH and was half way through her term. All the Timor-Leste staff, other than one of the security men, were younger than 30 and all originally came from districts outside Dili.

Besides the KBH staff, were the young women from GFFTL, the organisation in the opposite office. GFFTL had three paid staff and a group of volunteers, mostly female and mostly university students. As many as six young female volunteers worked there at any one time, coming in between lectures or after classes had finished. The

coordinator of KBH was also a previous GFFTL worker, and her cousin was one of the trainers sometimes employed by KBH to do joint training projects. This cousin later became the KBH training manager. The female Expressional Arts trainer was also the sister in-law of the training manager and cousin by marriage to the coordinator. Within a few months the administration assistant left to take up a position with a bilateral agency which offered three times the salary of KBH and a new administration assistant was chosen from the ranks of the GFFTL volunteers. A young man employed to assist the EAP group was a brother of one of the young GFFTL women whose family was also, in a small way, financially supported by the GFFTL trainer who would become the KBH training manager. His employment was openly seen as a way of giving him an opportunity to develop skills and to earn money. In short, most staff could be traced and linked in some way to each other. While not all staff were from the same village many came from Lospalos and Viqueque districts in the east of Timor-Leste.

Most of the time, the atmosphere at KBH was a like a big family. There was lots of laughter and chatter between the two offices with people dropping in and out on a continuous basis and if tensions did arise they seemed to evaporate relatively quickly. It was easy to believe in that environment that the violence and conflict of the past was, if not forgotten, at least dealt with in a way that people could move on. In the early months of my placement I learnt quite quickly about the deeper undercurrents within the organisation as the scenario in Box 5.2 demonstrates.

#### **Box 5-2 Hidden agendas**

During my first few months at KBH I was still struggling with the language and had decided to employ a local person who spoke Indonesian, Tetun, Portuguese and English to translate documents for me and to act as an interpreter during interviews with organisations other than KBH. A young man was highly recommended to me by an international friend and after an interview where I found him to be suitable for the job I employed him. However, when he arrived at KBH to meet me to go to an interview, several of the KBH and GFFTL staff became distraught at his presence in the building: it emerged that while this young person had no history of violence himself, the staff members believed his family were involved in the deaths of over 100 of their family members in 1975-89. Within this context, it was inappropriate for me to offer him the position.

Later, through informal discussions, I learnt that there were two people working in the building who were said to be involved politically, through their families, with groups aligned with the Indonesians and the militias.

Continued

Although their histories were known among staff they appeared to be able to co-exist within the organisation. I was unable to understand why this was the case, though my observations suggested that the situation was managed through an elaborate system of roles and status, and family relationships. One was related by marriage to a close relative of a KBH staff member while the other was working in a subordinate role within the organisation. The two people were allowed to remain in the organisation but they were restricted and regulated by these relationships. In these instances, family and close relationships provided a way of working together and dealing with the past and the present.

### 5.13 Caught in Transition

In May 2004, one month after I arrived, APHEDA like many other international NGOs, was forced, through reduced funding, to reduce its operating costs in Timor-Leste. It did this by replacing the APHEDA international coordinators position based in Timor with a volunteer position which allowed them to maintain all the salaried Timor-Leste staff. To reduce costs further, APHEDA relocated its office to the KBH building and began renting one of the large classrooms at the back of the KBH building<sup>26</sup>. These rental payments became an important source of steady income for KBH particularly as the period of operational funding was drawing to a close and KBH was solely responsible for the on-going upkeep and security of the building. An added advantage of APHEDA sharing the building was that APHEDA's computer technician (available to all APHEDA local partners) was close at hand to assist with the ever failing KBH network system and ageing computers.

With limited funds to support KBH in the long-term, APHEDA encouraged KBH to give more consideration to its long-term financial sustainability by broadening its donor base to include a wider range of organisations and agencies and government departments as partners and clients. Therefore, in mid-2004 KBH needed to come up with new plans, new ideas and new funding opportunities, to cover its operational costs and to continue to run training for its client communities in Dili and the districts. A strategic planning meeting was held to discuss the issues faced by KBH in competing in a changing environment where money was harder to get and came with ever increasing regulations and requirements and stringent reporting and accounting procedures.

A list of internal and external challenges that reflected some of the challenges KBH faced in the changing environment was drawn up from this meeting, one of the most important being the lack of experienced financial management. Box 5.3 describes

the way in which KBH managed its finances up until the end of 2005 and gives a picture of the difficulties faced by a local NGO in establishing a financial system robust enough to satisfy new donor expectations and regulations, and capable of handling multiple projects.

### **Box 5-3 Filing-cabinet accountability**

Coming from a country with a highly developed economic system and with very formal systems and expectations of accountability and transparency placed upon NGOs, I was unprepared for the creative accountancy and financial management practices of KBH. My taken for granted reality was soon shaken as I learnt that in a post emergency/conflict country with major infrastructure problems, learning how to deal with large sums of money with only meagre banking facilities available is a major challenge for local NGOs.

In late 1999 with the arrival of the peace keeping forces the Rupiah was replaced by the US dollar. In 2004, Timor remained working under a cash system meaning that few people used cheques or plastic cards except for foreigners. Funding bodies made direct deposits into bank accounts and transactions were all in cash.

When I first started at KBH relatively large amounts of money were kept in the locked filing cabinet in the office. I found out by asking around that this was not unusual practice for small local NGOs and perhaps even larger ones. A visit to the bank at that time could take a full working day depending on the queues.

Consequently, the administration person could spend an entire day at the bank without getting money, which in turn meant that projects were held up because of lack of pay or lack of money for transport.

As a response to this predicament it became much easier and more efficient, if less secure, to withdraw a large amount of money at one time and keep this in the filing cabinet. KBH's accounting and reporting system was quite simple and effective and had been set up by an international adviser. Subsequent international advisers had contributed to the system and in the capacity building of the ever changing administration staff (four changes alone in the time I was there) and coordinator (three in three years). In the filing-cabinet the money for each project was divided into different envelopes. As money was needed a debit slip was filled out and filed and the transaction recorded in the cash book. As a project ended a report was written which included a financial reconciliation or acquittal of all expenditure and every receipt and debit slip was pasted meticulously into a booklet, usually amounting to a figure very close to the total of the original proposed budget cost.

This procedure worked particularly well when KBH was undertaking one project at a time, for a single funding body, and was receiving operational funding from one source. However, if KBH were to take on multiple projects and to derive operational funding as a proportion of each project rather than a single source from one donor, a much more sophisticated accounting system would be needed as well as a person qualified to implement that system — neither of which KBH currently had.

Other serious issues KBH faced included:

- A lack of qualified training staff permanently attached to KBH without constant work it was difficult to maintain high quality staff trained in popular and participatory education methodology;
- A high turnover of administration staff led to confusion and lack of continuity in understanding office and administrative procedures;
- A fear and lack of experience by the leadership in managing multiple projects which would be necessary for KBH to take on in order to survive;
- Low staff morale because of job insecurity, low salaries and salaries not being paid on time; and
- Slow and unresponsive decision-making processes. The Board of Management members were all coordinators or members of other NGOs and as such were also facing similar pressures. Board meetings were therefore often cancelled and decisions not made quickly and efficiently.

To address these problems several strategies were agreed to by the Board on a short-term trial basis. These strategies included:

- Employing a training manager to: 1) oversee all training projects and training of trainers in the districts and at KBH; 2) standardise training methods and procedures within KBH; and 3) identify opportunities to diversify KBH's donor base;
- Employing a part-time financial manager to manage multiple project accounts so as to ease the pressure on the coordinator and the administration assistant;
- Undertaking new training courses at KBH, outside the traditional priority training area (for example computing courses), so as to engage the local Dili community; and
- Giving the coordinator greater autonomy in decision-making relating to the day-to-day running of KBH so that issues could be acted upon quickly.

To facilitate the restructuring process it was necessary for KBH to seek bridging funding from APHEDA. They needed APHEDA to continue paying operational funding until June 2005. APHEDA agreed to the bridging funding proposal and to the extra money required for the two new positions which gave KBH a nine month grace period to implement its new strategies. APHEDA also continued to fund the

volunteer position of the international technical adviser for the same period<sup>27</sup> to assist with the restructuring.

It was this position, as the volunteer technical adviser, that I agreed to take on during the next two stages of my fieldwork.

#### **5.14 Searching for Funds**

In early September 2004, as the only international worker, and as part of the restructuring project, I was asked by the KBH coordinator to accompany the new training manager on a visit to all the bilateral agencies and/or their related embassies in Dili to gather funding applications and guidelines and to discuss with their staff funding opportunities. Most of the Embassies in Timor-Leste at that time were heavily guarded and fortified and passing through their security gates proved difficult, and impossible without passports and adequate identification. Few Timor-Leste people had passports at that time but usually had an identification card. The aim was to identify funding sources that would match the organisation's general criteria for training and fit its ideological vision and mission as closely as possible, and to then apply for funding to deliver appropriate training projects.

KBH was in the same situation as many local NGOs in Timor-Leste at that time, all competing for a diminishing pool of funds. It soon became obvious from interviews with bilateral agency staff that most available grants and funds were very specifically targeted in terms of locations and beneficiaries, and some did not fit easily with KBH's criteria and service delivery, while more and more donors were targeting communities directly rather than working through local NGOs.

By the end of 2004 and in response to the very limited donor funds now available for local NGOs, KBH decided to pursue several options. The first option was to re-negotiate a new contract with a multilateral agency for whom KBH had previously provided training and who had expressed an interest in continuing work with KBH (Box 5.4) The second option was to make a proposal to a bilateral agency for funding to support a five-month agricultural training program in Viqueque, a district in the eastern part of Timor-Leste (Box 5.5). The third was to make a proposal to develop three community learning centres as a pilot for a multilateral agency who had approached KBH to do so (Box 5.6). It was envisaged by KBH that by engaging in these three projects they would be able to use a percentage from each for operational funding. This combined with extra fee-for-service work, rental income and continued (though reduced) financial support from APHEDA, should secure a

reasonable income for 2005-2006. The term reasonable income meant enough money for operational costs and to maintain the salaries for all the current staff for at least one year while they delivered training and monitored and evaluated projects.

The following three scenarios in Boxes 5.4, 5.5 and 5.6 give an outline of three different experiences KBH staff had in pursuing these projects. Each scenario highlights in different ways the difficulties for a small local NGO in: negotiating reasonable and workable projects; negotiating conditions and contracts with a multilateral agency; establishing legitimacy, trust and respect with a multilateral agency; and building partner relationships, particularly with multilateral and bilateral agencies.

#### **Box 5-4 Negotiating a new project with a multilateral agency**

One of the major projects that KBH was engaged in was to deliver a specific type of training for a major multi-lateral organisation (MLA). The first stage of the project had gone well and the MLA was keen for KBH to deliver the second stage. This stage involved selecting three new districts to work in while maintaining contact and building on the work previously started in the first three districts. Part of the negotiations for this stage involved deciding on reasonable work outputs, transport costs and time allowance for travel to and from and within the districts during the project. While I use the word negotiation it is not descriptive of the inter-change that transpired. While the MLA project staff wanted to do the best they could by KBH they were constrained by institutional rules and formulas set by the New York office, and KBH staff could do little but accept these conditions or lose the project.

The MLA staff were also unsure how they wanted the second part of the project to be implemented and wanted KBH to come up with a new plan for how the specific training might be done. While this gave KBH staff an opportunity to shape the project it also caused several other problems for KBH to overcome. First, the planning task itself was difficult for KBH local staff as most of the discussions to that point had been carried out in English, making it difficult for KBH staff to grasp what the MLA wanted and what would be acceptable to propose. Second, the project staff had limited experience in designing projects of this size and scope. Third, the planning would involve a great deal of consultation with each of the six communities involved, which, as outlined in Box 5.1, was a time and resource consuming activity, hampered also by the fact that the two project staff had not received a salary for several months. Fourth, the logistics of actually negotiating a proposal in the form of a lengthy document with a MLA was daunting in itself as it required a lengthy process of corrections and adjustments to reach the final draft. As KBH was unable to afford the internet connection by this time, they were unable to send the document back and forth by email.

The reality of this negotiation for KBH staff meant catching a taxi (which needed a receipt) to the office of the agency, waiting for the agency contact to see them, returning by taxi (another receipt) with corrections in hard copy, and then making manual changes on the computer and returning the revised document to the donor. Continued



This set of negotiations took four months of writing and re-writing before it met with the approval of all levels of the MLA agency, including its main office in New York.

For a small NGO like KBH such long and protracted negotiations outlined in Box 5.4 could mean the downfall of the organisation, as few small NGOs could have lasted that long without financial inputs. Indeed, it was only that KBH was still being supported by APHEDA that it did survive through that period and was able to implement the training over the next nine months. In the end, the majority of the changes favoured the MLA and were made to appease the New York office which had strict output regulations and contractual regulations regarding countries in the 'long-term development' stage. However, KBH was able to negotiate with the MLA project manager for the MLA to pay part of the salary of the finance manager to administer the financial contract and to employ an international mentor for 30 days during the life of the project.

#### **Box 5-5 Establishing a working relationship with a bilateral agency**

In late 2004 a community in one of the districts in the eastern part of Timor-Leste approached KBH with an initiative to implement a sustainable agricultural training program for women and young people in their district. It was to be a joint project involving KBH, the community and the local high school, and the school would continue to run the project after the initial training finished. Two of the people working for KBH came from this district so it was not surprising that the community knew about the work of KBH or were asking the organisation for assistance. Nevertheless, the project was legitimate and interesting and well within KBH's scope and area of expertise. After working out a budget and an action plan based on what the community wanted and what KBH could reasonably deliver, various international agencies and organisations were visited to find one with funding criteria and targets that would fit the needs of the project and of KBH, or one to which KBH could adapt its needs and the needs of the community.

Eventually after 'shopping around' a bilateral agency was found which had a program which appeared to be the 'closest fit' to what KBH and the community needed. The application and guidelines were duly obtained and as the project met the first level criteria of the bilateral agency, KBH was advised by the agency staff to proceed with the application. The cut off date left only two weeks for further extensive consultation with the community and with community leaders, from district administrator to Chefi de Suku (village head), as specified in the application. This was a difficult and time consuming task as the community was ten hours by bus from Dili. Nevertheless, a detailed 15 page proposal with itemised budget for four training sessions was completed in English and delivered to the Embassy by the KBH training manager on the evening of the cut off period. As the training manager did not have adequate identification she was not allowed into the Embassy and instead had to entrust the proposal to a guard at the gate, who promised to deliver it to the nominated person within the Embassy.

Continued



The following morning the training manger rang the bilateral agency to make sure that the application had been delivered and was told that it had and that they would contact KBH within two weeks with the results of the application. After two weeks of waiting, a call to the embassy revealed that there had been a mistake and that the application had been lost. The training manager was asked to bring another copy of the proposal to the Embassy but was also told that the International Board responsible for approving applications had already met and allocated the funds for that period. The proposal, however, would be held over for the next funding round in three months time when it would be re-submitted. Numerous phone calls by the training manager, to follow up the next round of funding and the proposal over the next four or five months, resulted in nothing.

The training manager then asked me, as an international worker, to ring the international staff at the embassy, and I was told that KBH's proposal did not meet the criteria for the dollars per beneficiary ratio that was required. The training manager then, after five months of negotiation, sent a message to the community to let them know that KBH would be unable to deliver the training.

The point of outlining the scenario in Box 5.5 is not to argue that every proposal proffered by a local NGO to a BLA should be granted or that all travelling expenses should be reimbursed, whether or not the proposal is accepted. Rather, it exemplifies the difficulties small local NGOs have in establishing close relationships with BLAs which can be both symbolically - as the representative of a foreign power- and physically - situated behind armed guards and barricades, isolated. In contrast, KBH had worked successfully for three years with APHEDA in a very productive relationship (see training outputs from Section One) and one based on mutual trust and respect. Perhaps most importantly, APHEDA was both accessible and approachable. For example, if KBH had an idea for training, the staff could meet face-to-face with the APHEDA coordinator on familiar ground and discuss the idea. If it was thought worthwhile, KBH would consult further with the community. While the project staff would not be paid during this consultation, at least they were confident in the fact that the project would go ahead in some shape or other and that their time would not be wasted.

Furthermore, in every instance when the BLA failed to communicate or give feedback to KBH about the acceptance or rejection of the proposal, it reinforced the unequal relationships between KBH, as a local NGO, and the BLA. As a local NGO, KBH was expected to meet the conditions of the BLA but there was no reciprocal responsibility by the BLA to comply with its own notification and feedback policy. This gap was further reinforced when, as an international worker, I rang the

embassy to find out what had happened and was able to get instant feedback after the local training manger, despite many calls, was unable to do so.

#### **Box 5-6 Establishing legitimacy with a multilateral agency**

At around the same time as the scenario in Box 5.5 was unfolding, KBH received a request by a multilateral agency (MLA) to submit a proposal to run a pilot project to set up three Community Learning Centres in Timor-Leste. The MLA regional Director had visited KBH and, impressed with the work KBH did, wanted KBH to run the pilot. He requested that KBH consult with three designated communities and write a draft proposal which was to be sent to him within two weeks outlining the setting up and running of the three centres.

KBH staff discussed the idea and although there were some differing opinions over which three locations should be chosen for the community learning centres (the MLA had chosen one location that KBH believed was already over serviced), it was agreed that a proposal would be written. The concept was one that KBH had talked about previously as a way of dealing with the problem of being too remote from the communities they serviced.

Monitoring visits had revealed that to train people in Dili and then send them back to their villages to train others required, adequate ongoing support and mentoring to be successful. Yet existing project funding did not allow for the intensive follow up and support needed. The development of community centres (in existing community buildings) where a management committee would represent the community and its needs was an attractive idea to KBH and to the communities KBH consulted.

As the application was required to be written in English, I became the designated writer while the local staff went to the districts to consult with the communities and to obtain district level permission for the project. All three communities were eager to be involved with the project as were the district heads. The proposal and the consultations were completed within the time frame by KBH staff, paid and unpaid and friends, working and travelling for many hours in their own time, and was sent to Jakarta using APHEDA's internet connection by the due date. After 3-4 weeks of hearing nothing and emails not being answered, I was told, unexpectedly, by the MLA representative in Timor-Leste that the proposal was successful and the funds would be transferred in due course. She told me this unofficially and said that official confirmation would be coming soon. KBH staff were elated as it meant not only that they could set up the community learning centres but that they would also be able to cover at least half their operational costs in 2005 with this funding.

I returned to Australia a few days later after committing to return in March 2005 for a further four months to assist KBH with the process of setting up and training the CLCs. However, when the money did not come through, it was only after persistent phone calls and emails to the MLA representative in Timor-Leste (emails to the Director in Jakarta were not returned) that KBH found out that they had changed their minds and chosen an international, rather than a local organisation, to pilot the project. Later I was told 'unofficially' by the MLA representative in Timor-Leste that when they heard I was returning to Australia, and unaware that I was returning, they had decided not to fund KBH. The decision was based on the belief that without an international worker KBH did not have the staff with the necessary skills to competently conduct the project.

Box 5.6 outlines some of the difficulties a small local NGO faces in trying to establish its legitimacy as a responsible and competent aid organisation in its own right in the minds of international workers and agencies. Despite having a good reputation and background experience in implementing many successful projects, the single most important factor in winning the tender was having an international worker attached to the organisation.

Again this scenario, like Box 5.5, reinforces the unequal relationships that exist between international aid workers and local people in this context.

These are not the only interactions KBH had with international agencies and organisations during this period. KBH did successfully engage in training activities with several other international aid organisations which worked in Timor-Leste in a similar way to APHEDA. For example, these organisations had international staff on the ground who were approachable and easily accessible to local organisations and who were also able to represent the needs of local NGOs to their organisations out of country.

### **5.15 Conclusion**

KBH was built on strong local ideological principles and these shaped very closely the work KBH undertook up until mid-2004. APHEDA, as an international organisation and the major partner of KBH during that time, allowed KBH, as much as possible given its own donor constraints, to steer its own course and supported its efforts to do so, both financially and by providing on-going technical support. The strength of APHEDA's support lay in its relationship of trust, respect and accessibility to KBH as a partner and as a mentor. This relationship allowed APHEDA to play a guiding rather than a dominating role in the partnership. As a relatively small international organisation with an international coordinator working in Timor-Leste alongside KBH and the other eight local NGOs it was supporting, APHEDA was able to respond to the needs of KBH on a daily basis and to understand the constraints and challenges it faced.

Post mid-2004, when it became necessary for KBH to widen its scope and to look for other means of providing operational funds and funds to run projects, it came up against agencies with whom it had no long-term history of involvement at such a close level as it did with APHEDA. Consequently KBH struggled to develop partnerships with these agencies that gave it sufficient status and leverage to win

the proposals or to negotiate the best conditions. However, while KBH was willing to shape itself to a certain degree to fit the criteria of the funding bodies, either by accepting to work in districts they felt were over supplied (Box. 5.6), accepting conditions that were adverse for them (Box 5.4) or going with the closest fit (Box 5.5), they did so within the framework of their core beliefs and values. The story may have been different without the continued financial and technical support of APHEDA during this process. Few small NGOs would have been able to remain viable during the protracted and difficult proposal preparations and negotiations outlined in the three scenarios.

This chapter has attempted to show the significant imbalance in the power relationships between local NGOs and international NGOs/donors in the post-conflict, post-emergency period. It has also tried to show how local NGOs can find themselves bound up in highly dependent relationships that have the potential to shape their strategies, objectives and goals to meet international objectives. In Chapter Six this power differential is elaborated further as the issues and challenges faced by local NGOs are examined from a local, insider's perspective. In Chapter Seven the same issues are again examined from an external perspective, through the eyes of international workers on the ground in Timor-Leste. In Chapter Eight all three perspectives are discussed in relation to the issues covered in the literature review.

## **Chapter Six**

### **Challenges and Issues from a Local Perspective**

#### **6.1 Introduction**

This chapter addresses the third objective of my thesis which is to identify and explore the major challenges faced by KBH in attempting to maintain its overall vision, mission and goals whilst conducting its activities in the post-conflict environment of aid and development in Timor-Leste. Drawing on the data I collected as a participant observer during my time in the field, I outline the main challenges faced by KBH specifically and by local NGOs generally, as seen from the perspective of local NGO workers. Data collected from interviews with local Timor-Leste staff (sourced both from KBH, and other local NGOs) have also been included. The data are discussed under two central themes: 'Internal challenges to meet external conditions' and 'Interface issues'. The first theme reflects on the internal challenges faced by a local NGO in attempting to meet the requirements/conditions/regulations of international donors and the difficulties encountered in adapting to an environment dominated by the externally imposed conditions of the supplanted international aid world. The second theme explores the challenges faced by local NGOs in negotiating specific partnerships and relationships with international donor agencies and aid organisations. These challenges are collectively described as 'Interface issues' because they arise from the point of contact between the two spheres.

#### **6.2 Internal Challenges to Meet External Conditions**

As discussed in Chapter Three, when a local NGO operates in the post conflict/post emergency phase, it does so in an environment populated by large international donor organisations, bilateral, multilateral, and international aid organisations' which have a great deal of control over how funds are dispersed, including to which organisations they are dispersed and under what conditions. Most local NGOs in Timor-Leste are reliant on international donor funding for a large proportion of their recurrent funding and project work which allows them to provide services to their communities. In order to attract funding, however, NGOs must first conform to and comply with the general expectations and criteria of the funding organisation. This means that an NGO must comply with the donor's governance and financial accountability requirements, be able to deliver a service that fits within the donor's

specific scope and target population group, and convince the donor that the NGO is a reliable and legitimate local partner with the capacity to carry out project activities. The degree to which an NGO is able to conform to the criteria laid down by donor organisations often dictates the success of grant applications and the degree to which the NGO is able to retain the support once acquired.

Several major internal challenges that had an impact on the capacity of a local NGO to meet donor needs and to successfully deliver services to their community in a post-conflict, post-emergency environment are listed below.

- Language and technology: the need to adapt to new languages and technologies.
- Staffing: a lack of skilled and experienced staff; over-employment of family and friends; continual draining of local staff into international jobs; low salaries; and reliance on international staff.
- Governance: learning new styles of leadership and management to meet donor expectations.
- Financial management and administration systems: learning new financial management and administration systems to meet donor requirements.
- These challenges are discussed further below with reference to case study material derived from fieldwork.

### **6.3      Adaptation to New Languages and Technologies**

#### ***Languages***

One of the major challenges faced by KBH in its role as an NGO was adapting to new languages and communication technologies. Some of the frustration of having to continually navigate their way through a language ‘minefield’ which daily impacted on every facet of NGO life, and particularly in their relationships with international agencies and organisations and government agencies, is expressed in the following statements by local NGO workers.

There are lots of problems [in working with international organisations] but the main problem is that they want us to write and speak in English and everything must be done in English so if you can’t speak English then you can’t say anything. (KI.20)

Also they [internationals] need to work in Tetun. This is Timor not Australia or America, they should speak the language of the

country they are working in like a Timorese person would if they were working in Australia. (KI.22)

The reasons behind the strong desire of young people to speak their own language, becomes apparent in reviewing the history of language in Timor. Post-1999 local NGOs, largely staffed by an Indonesian and Tetun speaking generation of young Timorese people, were flooded with old and new languages as Portuguese and English-speaking expatriate Timorese returned home and the predominantly English speaking aid industry arrived. The official language of Timor-Leste became Portuguese in 2002, and while in 2005, Tetun, widely spoken throughout Timor-Leste, also became a national language it did not have the technical words needed for the new environment and relied instead on 'borrowed' words from Portuguese or Indonesian, depending on the favoured language of the user. Bahasa Indonesian and English continued to be treated as working languages during this time. This newly imposed multi-lingual situation greatly disadvantaged predominantly Indonesian speaking staff of small local NGOs in several ways as described below.

First, at a functional level, in 2004 most government documents were written in, and responses were often required in, Portuguese despite only 5%<sup>28</sup> of the total population being fluent in Portuguese (*East Timor: United Nations Development Assistance Framework (2003-2004)* n.d). No staff during my time at KBH could speak, read or write Portuguese fluently. If a document arrived at KBH from a government department, a strategy developed by the organisation was to send a messenger with the document to a 'friend' of a staff member, working in the government, for translation. This was particularly challenging at the time as many new and compulsory government regulations regarding the registration of vehicles, car licenses, employee tax, and land tax were being reinstated and information relating to these services was sent out in Portuguese. On several occasions, through lack of understanding, KBH failed to comply with government regulations and the motorbikes were not licensed on time making them illegal to ride. More seriously, a bill for outstanding tax was not paid which could have led to a fine. Lapses or oversights such as these could damage the reputation of a small NGO or, in extreme circumstances, force it to close.

Second, the lack of English fluency greatly restricted KBH's capacity to develop project proposals to access crucial funds for the running of the organisation and to deliver services for client communities. Many of the funding proposal applications and guidelines of the donor organisations were in English and applications were required in English. Only 2% of the population of Timor-Leste spoke English (*East*

*Timor: United Nations Development Assistance Framework (2003-2004)* n.d) and within KBH only two of the local staff (the administration worker and one of the project workers) spoke some English. Neither was fluent in writing English. For a small NGO such as KBH which relied heavily on donor funding for its everyday functioning, this was a significant challenge.

Third, in this environment, international advisers became important players in the negotiation and writing of proposals. The negative impact of this situation was that many important meetings with international donors, such as the negotiations in Box 5.4 relating to contracts, conditions, salaries, reporting mechanisms and timeframes, were held in English rather than Indonesian or Tetun. Local staff were left out of the loop not completely understanding what was being proposed or what the implementation, monitoring and reporting obligations were. This concern is aptly expressed by one local worker in the following quote, “So often we don’t understand what is happening with the project or the organisation because we cannot speak English and they [international workers] just speak English” (KI.20).

While attempts were made at KBH to translate documents from English into Indonesian or Tetun or vice versa, this is a costly and time consuming activity. For an organisation like KBH, with few financial resources, translation costs were beyond its means. Time was also an issue because with a small busy staff there was never enough time to explain fully the situation before staff were rushing to meet another externally imposed deadline.

Depending on the language of the KBH person who attended a meeting or who created a document, negotiations or records might be conducted or written in one of four languages: English, Portuguese, Tetun or Indonesian. Compounding this issue, notifications, bills, advertisements and reports might be equally as varied in the language employed. For example, all formal government notifications and policy documents are written in Portuguese. Communications between NGOs and most NGO organisational policy and regulations are written in Indonesian, and everyday spoken communications such as phone calls and meetings are usually conducted in Tetun, while directives emanating from the international aid industry favoured English. The language difficulties encountered meant that there was limited shared understanding of internal (within the organisation) and external communications.



The language barrier also had the effect of 'locking up' information by limiting the degree to which staff might access necessary knowledge and resources. This phenomenon is demonstrated in the scenario depicted in Box 6.1.

**Box 6-1 The paradox of the resource room**

As discussed in Chapter Two, my negotiated role at KBH in the first three months of my placement was to re-organise the resource room which had reverted to a storage area and temporary sick bay. The idea for the resource centre had come out of the earlier English language training courses prior to 2004, as discussed in Chapter Five. At the time it was envisaged that the centre would continue to be a valuable source of information for local students and teachers. Besides the English language learning books, it contained many texts and manuals on a variety of subjects including human rights education, gender training, training for organising, popular education and participatory training methods. These books, donated mostly from Australia, had been used for training previously conducted by international volunteers supported by local staff.

What I found, however, as I started cataloguing the books with the help of the cleaner, a part-time University student, was a collection of resources largely inaccessible to the current staff as they were mostly written in English. Perhaps more importantly, the room also contained records of KBH's history and details of its training methodology and practice, again written in English by previous advisers, and equally inaccessible to the current staff for that reason. This being the case, the paradox was that the resource room was more valuable to KBH as a storage room, sick bay or potential extra office space than a repository of knowledge, inaccessible as it was by being 'locked up' in a foreign language. This situation was not limited to KBH – in libraries all over Dili, large and small, a similar situation pertained.

Language, therefore, presented major challenges to the NGO attempting to successfully navigate its way in the post-conflict, post-emergency context. The new environment introduced new languages which limited the degree of shared understanding between donor and NGO and the degree to which one could communicate with the other over important matters such as grant applications and financial reporting. It favoured certain languages over others, making the issue of language not only a daily inconvenience but a socially contentious issue often resulting in exclusion, disadvantage and ill-feeling, as well as impacting negatively on internal organisational communications. Lastly it limited the degree to which information, knowledge and resources could be accessed and shared within the organisation, including access to the NGO's own records, systems, regulations and history.

### ***Computer technology***

Language was not the only communication and information sharing challenge faced by KBH. The flood of aid money and donations post-1999 brought with it a flood of computer technology as well. While issues related to the introduction of computers are not specific to a post-conflict, post-emergency environment, the rapid deployment of computer technology by aid agencies and organisations to meet their own needs, and the reliance upon it as a communication tool for all within the aid environment brings with it its own set of issues and problems. This was particularly the case for small local NGOs such as KBH. Staff adopted computer technology readily and made every effort to bring themselves up to speed with what was to many of them a new technology (the software for which was usually written in a foreign language). Whilst this broadened accessibility to donors in terms of increasing compatibility between the NGO and the donor, the new technology also brought with it new pressures as there was now an increased level of expectation by donors in the giving and receiving of information. Not only was more expected documentation required by donors but the style and formatting of information was now prescribed, necessitating use of different programs such as Microsoft Excel, Access, Publisher and Word.

Associated communication technologies, such as email and web research, were now also expected to be used by local NGOs. International donors ignored or were oblivious of the fact that many local NGOs did not have a phone line, let alone the means to pay and service one. What someone might view as easy and achievable, a taken for granted reality, sitting in an office in a modern city (as evidenced in my description in Chapter Five of my own initial negotiations with KBH) or indeed in a well equipped office in Timor-Leste, at a computer with a reliable network connection and a paid-up telecom account, was a major feat for a small NGO like KBH. As evidenced in Box 5.4, such organisations simply do not have the resources to cope with such expectations let alone the related financial costs incurred such as printer cartridges, paper, USB flash drives, back-up disks and other expendable items.

There were several other serious consequences for KBH which arose due to the organisation's increased dependency on computer technology without having sufficient training in the use of computers or the support to adequately maintain them. One consequence was that information vital to the running of KBH was continually being lost or misplaced as computers 'crashed' or malfunctioned and

documents were saved in 'odd' places by untrained staff. This predicament was partially due to the fact that the computers were second-hand and in need of constant maintenance, a situation aggravated by the humidity and dusty environment. This issue coupled with a lack of constant technical support and staff members unskilled in general computer maintenance or unaware of the need to scan for viruses, often resulted in valuable and critical information being lost. While staff had received initial training in computers, the rapid turn over of staff left critical gaps in the knowledge base.

In the same way that language affected NGO operations, computer technology too brought a new list of challenges to overcome. Whilst it brought with it the potential for access to new sources of information and office efficiency, the potential could only be partly realised without the necessary training and knowledge, experience, financial provisions and suitable equipment, all of which the small NGO in Timor-Leste at this time did not have. As a result, the new technology in many ways became an impediment rather than a support, raising expectations of the NGO's capacity whilst not actually contributing to the building of that capacity in any real way. In some cases, it actually reduced that capacity as exemplified by the loss of important information files and the increased financial strain.

## **6.4 Staffing Related Issues**

### ***The employment of family and friends***

In my experience KBH is similar to many local NGOs in Timor-Leste, Aceh or in Indigenous communities in Australia in its family and friendship based employment patterns (see Chapter Five). Word-of-mouth recommendation and recruitment is used in many contexts and by all sorts of organisations and agencies, international and local, as an acceptable recruitment strategy. It is a particularly important practice in emergency and post-emergency situations where reliable and trustful people must be identified and employed quickly to implement projects and deploy emergency supplies and services. In countries recovering from long-term conflict, issues such as trust, political and family allegiances and history, dependence and obligation are often more likely to be taken into consideration before looking at the relevant skills and experience of the person involved. There is also a great sense of kinship and social obligations to find paid work for relatives and friends in an environment of high unemployment, poverty and high living-costs.

At KBH the tight family and friendship bonds within the organisation worked in positive and negative ways. In a positive way friends and family could be relied upon to work long hours without pay during situations such as those described in Box 5.5 and Box 5.6 when only small amounts of money were coming in. Also new proposals relied on staff travelling to the districts for monitoring and community consultations. Family and friends could also be called upon as volunteers to chauffeur staff members who were without bike or vehicle licenses, to the bank, meetings or training venues. Perhaps most importantly, however, the employment of friends and family ensured knowledge of the background and connections of the person being employed and, to some extent, control of the work-place situation as described in Box 5.2.

In a more negative way employment of family members resulted, at times, in people being employed who did not have the necessary skills and education levels for the job, or the motivation to do the work. Family disputes were also known to occasionally disrupt the work of the organisation as disagreements were brought into the office making communication between parties difficult and productive work almost impossible. While normally short-lived, family-related disputes added to the stress and tension for everyone within the organisation, particularly as an argument between two people might escalate and require other members to take sides.

So, the usual way of conducting staff relations in Timor-Leste, to adopt elements of the familial system and extend them to working life, here acted as an impediment to successful participation in the aid environment. Donors frowned upon staff familial relations for reasons of nepotism and the demand for transparency in all organisational procedures. Familial relations in the workplace meant that people who were not necessarily the most suited or even capable of doing a job might get that job over a more suitable applicant, which in a minimally populated workplace operating in a skill shortage environment, affected the organisation's ability to make any real movement forward.

### ***Skill shortages and the draining of local NGO staff***

Another key reason for employing family and friends was the severe local skill shortage in Timor-Leste post-1999. This shortage was the result of the long period of colonisation pre-1975 during which Portuguese people filled most of the senior and technical jobs followed by 25 years of Indonesian occupation, during which most of these jobs were filled by Indonesians. Consequently, the numbers of highly skilled and experienced Timor-Leste people in 1999 was very low (*East Timor:*

*United Nations Development Assistance Framework (2003-2004)* n.d). Post-1999, with the rebuilding of government and public service infrastructure as well as the need of the aid industry to fill local staff places within their own organisations, local NGOs were forced to compete on an uneven playing field, not only to find but also to retain staff within their organisations. In November 1999 international aid organisations developed a code of pay and conditions for national staff which was then adopted by UNTAET. This meant that when a donor was negotiating a project with a local NGO there was a set salary cap to be paid for local staff. However, while this code of pay kept the rates paid to local NGO workers at a minimum, rates continued to be set on a sliding scale for Timor-Leste employed in government positions and in international donor agencies and aid organisations. On this scale, government salaries were the lowest followed by international NGOs while the multilateral agencies, bilateral donors and international financial institutions (IFIs) paid the highest salaries (*A Review of Peace Operations: A Case for Change* 2003). These differential pay rates, coupled with better conditions and better security options for local people resulted in a continuous drain of local NGO workers, particularly those with specific skills and experience, into international organisations' jobs with MLAs, BLAs and IFIs.

The consequence for KBH, and other local NGOs, of this drain was is that they were constantly losing experienced skilled staff, often with skills developed during their employment with a local NGO. Worse still, departing staff took with them the knowledge and understanding of the NGO as well as their learnt experience and knowledge in managing the NGO. In a small NGO like KBH the consequences of staff departures can be severe as it can mean a total change of local staff within a short period which can lead to a critical loss of organisational memory including the NGO's vision, mission and goals as this information is not passed on (see Box 6.1), 'locked up' and unattainable.

Furthermore, the long-term benefits for the local NGO of any training and capacity-building experienced by departing staff are also lost. In an ironic twist, the benefits of that internal capacity building will move with the flow of departing staff to government and international agencies rather than to building the potential of the less resourced local NGOS. This has serious ramifications, particularly in terms of the loss of strong leadership and financial management, as good financial managers and leaders are the primary recruitment targets for government and international agencies.

The following examples give an indication of the shifting staff patterns, and the reasons for, and impacts of, the departures at KBH within a three-year period. KBH's administration officer left in mid-2004, after six months of employment, to take up a position with a bilateral agency at three times the salary KBH was able to pay. While she did not want to leave KBH, she felt she had little choice because of financial security reasons, "it is my future and my boyfriend doesn't have employment" (KI.32). This particular employee had, in the short time she was at KBH, attended three different capacity building training courses, paid for by APHEDA. Another part-time trainer also left to work with an international NGO for similar reasons saying, "I don't want to leave because I believe in KBH but I also need money to live and for my family" (KI.21). An APHEDA local staff member was also offered four times her salary by a multilateral agency to leave her job as the APHEDA office manager. Many previous KBH staff members successfully gained employment in international agencies or government departments because they were equipped with special skills developed while working for the local NGO.

Of course, local staff also leave local NGOs because of the pressures and stresses of working within an under-funded, over-worked organisation with limited long-term employment and salary prospects. Local staff also have the right to optimise their opportunities. However, there is an inequitable situation when a local NGO in partnership with an MLA or a BLA donor is forced to pay project staff under the joint agreement, a third of the salary of a local staff member working for the MLA and doing a similar job.

### ***Reliance on international staff***

Having an international staff member is a valuable, if not crucial, asset for a local NGO operating within an environment dominated by the international aid industry, and is dependent on accessing donor funds for their survival. The international worker speaks the language of development, understands, if not embraces, the culture of development and can act as intermediary between the NGO and the donor, particularly in negotiating funding (although this can lead to a different set of issues as outlined above and in Box 5.4). They also open a door to the informal networking system of the international world, so important in identifying possible funding sources, and can add to the NGO's legitimacy, an extremely important factor as illustrated in Box 5.6. The international worker in the role of capacity builder is also vital against a background of continually changing local staff and the

consequent leaching of organisation knowledge and skills, which they can 'top up' as new staff replace old, also as outlined above.

However, while there are significant advantages, and a high degree of pleasure and appreciation felt by local staff in having an international staff member who takes an interest in them and their culture, there are also disadvantages. The reality of the aid world is that international staff are constantly changing as they finish their contracts and move on to new emergency situations or return to their homelands. For smaller local NGOs, like KBH, who rely on international staff often working as volunteers, the turnover can be as rapid as two weeks, but usually not longer than six months. As one local worker said "they could give the adviser not just for one month or six months but for three years - this is how long it takes to learn new ways" (KI.21). The quick turnover gives the international worker very little time to understand the NGO and how it works and, as observed by the local staff member, limited time to effectively transfer skills and knowledge to build the capacity of local people.

International staff often bring with them high expectations of themselves and local staff, and firm views on how and what needs to be achieved within the limited time frame of their placement. This 'mindset' can lead to a perception by local staff that international staff have all the answers and are unwilling to listen to local staff about their knowledge and skills. As one local staff member commented "sometimes they [international workers] just want to advise about their organisation [and] they don't want to learn about a Timorese organisation" (KI.21). Thus opportunities for sharing and participatory learning are lost and local staff can be put under extra stress accommodating the needs and expectations of the international worker.

The arrival of international staff, an almost expected part of any successful NGO operating in Timor-Leste at this time, therefore brought many challenges to the small local NGO. International staff often had a high turnover rate which meant local staff would put a lot of energy into building relationships only to have them disconnected after six months and have to begin all over with someone new. These staff also created new problems as they solved others. Whilst language gaps were bridged, the introduction of another new language into the workplace often excluded staff from important negotiations, creating for some staff a feeling of disempowerment.



## **6.5 Governance: Learning New Styles of Leadership and Management to Meet Donor Requirements**

Maintaining strong leadership and management, or 'good governance', is particularly difficult for small NGOs in a country where there are few people with formal leadership and management experience in the workplace, either as organisation managers or Board members. As outlined above, the ability to recruit and retain experienced staff in a depleted labour market is extremely difficult. Local NGOs compete, not only with government and international agencies, but against the growing population of local NGOs which, like themselves, are also in need of staff with leadership skills. Leadership not only relates to the coordination or management of the NGO but to the leadership exerted by the NGO Board of Management or Advisory Board. This body ensures that the NGO is being managed in accordance with the vision and mission of the organisation and that the financial management and administration of the NGO's business and activities are transparent and compliant. The coordinator is directly responsible to the Board. The strength and governance of an NGO therefore can be largely attributable to the strength of the Board of Management.

This model of Leadership and Board Management is very much a western model and works well (though this is debatable) in western democracies. It generally requires members of an NGO Board of Management in Australia, for example, to be drawn from a wide range of backgrounds. While members may share an interest in the work the NGO does they also bring skills, knowledge and expertise from a wide variety of fields such as law, accountancy, community development, etc. In Timor-Leste, where the number of independent, experienced, community members available for Board membership is very low, a significant gap appears in the management structure and governance of small NGOs. In the case of KBH's Board, the members were often, as coordinators of their own NGOs, competing for the same work as KBH and by necessity putting the needs of their own organisations first. Under 'good governance' processes these issues would normally be seen as a conflict of interest and strongly discouraged, usually requiring the member in conflict to resign. However, with such a small pool of people to draw on it is difficult to avoid such situations.

In the absence of a strong supportive Board, a great deal of power and responsibility is shifted to the coordinator who, without the checks and balances of the Board, can be blamed for any irregularities and held accountable. Much of pressure is therefore placed upon the person in charge, and as Hailey (2006) notes in a survey of the



literature on NGO leadership and development, NGO leaders in the development environment “can often feel isolated and unsupported” (p.1). They can also be ‘scapegoated’ as inexperienced Board members see their role merely as monitors and policemen rather than active players in ensuring the transparency and compliance of the organisation.

Given the added pressures on coordinators and managers in the post-conflict environment, and the low salaries they are paid, it is easy to understand why so many show signs of stress (like the coordinator described in Box 6.2) or many choose to seek other less stressful positions.

#### **Box 6-2 The loneliness of responsibility**

Financial reporting to donors was a particularly stressful part of the job for the KBH coordinator who was accountable to the Board and to the donors for any financial discrepancies. In many ways the coordinator carried the responsibility for KBH alone and was often stressed to the point of illness. She had little previous experience of managing an NGO and, as the funding criteria of international donors became stricter and accountability expectations rose, she came under more intense pressure. If a mistake was made, she felt she would be held accountable by the donor as well as the Board.

By mid-2004, Board meetings were happening less frequently as the main Board members, coordinators themselves of local NGOs, had less time to attend meetings. Like the coordinator of KBH they were facing similar demands of increased accountability from their donors and similar pressures.

The result was the coordinator of KBH was being increasingly forced to make important decisions about KBH and its future without the Board’s advice and guidance. Her sense of loneliness and responsibility increased significantly.

As she told me on several occasions, “nobody understands, I don’t have any support or commitment – I am responsible for everything, I am responsible for reporting and finances and staff”.

(Interview with coordinator).

### **6.6 Learning New Financial Management and Administration Techniques to Fit Donor Needs**

Financial management and administration is a considerable problem for small local NGOs dependent on international donors, especially those that lack international technical assistance in financial management and administration or keep losing trained staff to other organisations. For these NGOs, most of the reporting requirements and procedures are determined by the donor and in some circumstances “an institutional model, complete with prefabricated administrative

and managerial procedures may have been imported” (Avina 1993, p. 58). However, no system, no matter how clever or efficient is useful if people are unable to use it. Again the lack of skilled local people available to learn the system and the continual drain of newly skilled people into international organisations and agencies contributes to the problem.

In KBH the administration assistant was responsible for bookkeeping, overseen by the coordinator. Former international technical advisers had set up the financial management and reporting system and the administration processes and procedures, and had taught the existing administration person and coordinator how to use the system as described in Box 5.3. However, with an almost six-monthly turnover of administration staff and yearly turnover of coordinators, the knowledge and understanding of the system was continually eroded. This predicament meant that on occasions small mistakes would be made with receipts or accounts which could not be explained clearly. When a mistake occurred with an APHEDA report the APHEDA finance person would walk the short distance to the KBH office and discuss the discrepancy with the coordinator and the issue would be explained and rectified. When KBH started to work with much bigger organisations such as a major MLA, the resolution of such problems was not so easy, as Box 6.3 illustrates.

#### **Box 6-3 The consequences of getting it wrong**

Towards the end of 2004, KBH made two reasonably small mistakes in a financial acquittal statement presented to a multilateral agency they had been working with for some months. The work had been completed and the MLA senior project officer, the person KBH staff had worked with throughout the project, had signed off on the project and financial report. Despite the approval of the senior project officer, the final payment was delayed. KBH staff were told that the MLA accounts section had detected discrepancies in the receipts. KBH had apparently claimed for the full price of a photocopy cartridge US\$250, and the MLA accountant believed that they should pay only a percentage of the costs. The MLA had also initially agreed at the beginning of the project to pay US\$40 per month towards electricity and one of the receipts was missing which meant that they would not pay for that month without seeing the receipt.

This problem at first appeared to be simple and easily rectified. However, from early March until late June 2005, the coordinator and I visited the MLA office on an almost bi-weekly basis in an on-going attempt to resolve the issue. After five months of constant negotiating by KBH staff, for whom it was a painful task as they lacked confidence and felt unsure in dealing with the unfamiliar MLA accounts section, and with lobbying by the sympathetic MLA project staff on KBH's behalf, the money was finally paid on the 30 June. The sum of money that the MLA withheld for over five months came to US\$4500, over a third of KBH's annual operational budget. The total of the receipts in question came to US\$290.

Continued

KBH staff survived during this time by sharing their salaries — the strong family and friendship bonds managed to sustain them until the money was finally paid.

As a postscript to this story, dissatisfied and frustrated by these protracted negotiations to resolve the issue, I questioned one of the senior MLA project staff about how a smaller, less supported NGO, would be able to endure the same process. They replied that often they didn't and simply gave up without getting their money.

The consequences for KBH of having such a large proportion of their budget withheld, as described in Box 6.3, were dire. As mentioned above, staff did not receive their full pay for many months and some bills were left unpaid for months, impacting on KBH's reputation and on staff morale. It could have led to the collapse of the organisation. It was a harsh lesson for KBH in terms of learning what 'getting it right' meant when dealing with major institutions.

## **6.7 Interface Issues**

The scenario in Box 6.3 illustrates one of the underlying problems facing local NGOs, namely their dependence on international funding. Most local NGOs in Timor-Leste are reliant on donor and, to a lesser extent, government funds to operate and to implement projects - it is the nature of the environment. Not only do they need to support their communities but many need donor funding to keep them operational and to maintain inherited or acquired resources and infrastructure such as computers, buildings and vehicles.

It is not easy for a small local NGO to develop a partnership with a bilateral or multilateral agency, or with a large international aid agency, based on equality. Firstly, they must establish their legitimacy by being a registered NGO and then they must comply with the management structure and financial accountability processes stipulated by the donor. They must also reveal who they have worked with before and who they are working for at present. In fact, in nearly every facet of the relationship the onus is on the local NGO to convince the international donor of their value. However, as Fowler (1997) observes, there is no responsibility upon the international agency or organisation to justify itself or indeed to answer to the local NGO as observed in Boxes 5.5 and 5.6.

While the headings in the first section of this chapter outlined internal challenges faced by local NGOs in adapting to and meeting externally imposed conditions and regulations, this section deals primarily with the challenges faced by a local NGO in negotiating its relationships with international agencies and organisations on whom

it must depend to ensure its survival and the delivery of its services to the communities it represents. The topics in this section are:

- Fitting existing ideologies to new externally imposed ideologies;
- Shaping project implementation and community engagement to donor requirements;
- Unequal relations in negotiation, networking and communication; and
- Transition issues.

Each topic is examined below.

### **6.8 Fitting Existing Ideologies to New Externally Imposed Ideologies**

Like KBH, many local NGOs in Timor-Leste were born out of the student solidarity groups and have a strong socialist or left wing philosophy which does not always sit easily with the government or the major donor groups, especially if these local NGOs are critical of what is happening in Timor-Leste in terms of aid and development. KBH was fortunate in developing a partnership with APHEDA who was, as discussed in Chapter Five a sympathetic and in many ways ideologically aligned international organisation. However, not all international donors are as compliant and concerned about maintaining the integrity of the organisations they work with. When two of KBH's founding organisations (SIL and LAIFET) openly criticised the Australian government for its treatment of Timor-Leste over the Timor Gap dispute (see letter - open email from the AusAID director of projects in Timor-Leste), they were removed from the AusAID list of eligible NGOs for support.

While the AusAID situation is a blatant example of how a donor might choose to influence or regulate the behaviour, rights or beliefs of a local organisation often the ways in which it is achieved are much more subtle. Often the shaping, or gentle process of change comes from within the organisation and is embedded in the silent accommodations that a local NGO makes on a daily basis to comply with the donor criteria in terms of good governance, financial management, addressing specific target groups and working in specific locations. In the initial establishment phase, KBH, as outlined in Chapter Five, adopted an organisational structure and constitution (guided by APHEDA) that would place it in the best position to attract funding, in this case from AusAID through APHEDA.

An international worker, such as me, working with a local NGO can also act as an agent of change or as a 'Trojan Horse'<sup>29</sup> by gaining entry, gaining trust and then

slowly, with the 'best of intentions', moving the organisation in the direction 'it needs to go' to obtain funding. Furthermore, in their position as 'expert' and with 'the best of intentions', the international worker has the potential, consciously and unconsciously, to impose their ideology, values, methodology and practice on the organisation for better or for worse. The result is that the NGO is slowly changed from within, with little resistance from staff and management, a problem exacerbated by the high turnover of local staff and the lack of strong attentive leadership. One of the KBH Board members told me that they had strong ideas but that they believed the advisers were doing their best and they didn't want to challenge them (KL.27). A long term consequence of this silent change from within can be a gradual withdrawal of interest and lack of ownership and responsibility felt by the Board and staff of the NGO. Indeed, the changes can be so incremental that the agent of change - the international worker - is unaware of their own impact and the direction in which they are gently pushing the NGO.

## **6.9 Donor-shaped Project Implementation and Community Engagement**

### ***Geographic dislocation from client communities***

Most international funding bodies in the 2004-2005 transition stage were located in Dili. Dili was the first place where buildings were rehabilitated and essential services such as water and electricity were restored, if somewhat haphazardly. It was a simple equation, if a local NGO wanted to access funding it needed to be near the source of that funding. From 1999 to 2005 few villages or towns outside Dili had electricity or telephone connections which made it extremely difficult for local NGOs based outside Dili to communicate with Dili and to develop networks outside the immediate vicinity. Remote communities often relied on local NGOs based in Dili to represent their case and to bring assistance, and in KBH's case, training to them. As a result many local NGOs, particularly those that had formed as part of the initial emergency relief response of 1999-2002, set up small offices in Dili while continuing to represent and deliver services to communities outside Dili.

This geographical dislocation from client community to NGO presented certain challenges in balancing appropriate community representation and consultation against the need to acquire sufficient funds to run projects and to meet the needs of the donors, both difficult and time-consuming activities. Meaningful community participation and engagement requires time, money and access to adequate resources to properly service remote communities, which in a country as mountainous as Timor-Leste are plentiful and often relatively inaccessible by road,

and with out telecommunications (Box 5.1). However, during my time at KBH, few proposals allowed a realistic funding allowance to enable KBH to consult with client communities effectively. Nor did staff working for international agencies have a realistic picture or understanding of what was involved for local staff and the financial drain on the limited operational budget of an NGO in trying to achieve an adequate level of consultation and support to client communities in remote locations.

While the need for appropriate community consultation, monitoring and evaluation processes is indisputable, the onus for these processes was largely devolved to local staff and local NGOs who shouldered the responsibility and financial costs. While it is unrealistic that NGOs submitting unsuccessful project proposals should be reimbursed for the costs of submitting an application, neither is it realistic that local NGOs be wholly responsible for shouldering all the impacts or be expected to carry out costly and un-funded consultations with remote rural communities.

In financial terms, for an international agency or aid organisation to deliver its own programs, complying with the same demands it expects of local NGOs, the cost would be three to four times the expenditure if the programs were delivered by a local NGO. They therefore rely heavily upon local NGOs to do this type of work – often the same work for which international agencies and organisations receive overseas development funds. As the research in Box 6.4 demonstrates, the 'bottom-up/participatory' approach is the preferred option for community-based projects but it is recognised as difficult, slow, time-consuming, and can raise community expectations which may not be fulfilled. For these reasons among others, a top-down 'packaged' approach (based on set rather than participatory content) is often used. International agencies and organisations need to be more aware of the financial and staffing constraints of NGOs so that the extensive preliminary consultations required do not act as a disincentive to apply for funding or create unnecessary financial stress for the organisation.

## Box 6-4 Lessons Learned but does anyone listen?

Early in 2004 I was invited to attend an information morning for international advisers, international agencies and NGO senior and project staff as well as local staff. The title of the presentation was “The Lessons Learned in Implementing Community Level Agriculture and NRM (National Resource Management) projects in Timor-Leste”. The research was a joint collaboration between the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF) and Oxfam, and it focused on programs being run by MAFF, international NGOs and the private sector. The purpose of the research was to document lessons learned and to make recommendations for future projects.

My interest was in the following slides which provoked me to ask: if government departments and major international agencies and organisations are unable to deliver on bottom-up/participatory community programs because of the constraints as outlined in Slide 2, why is there an expectation that local NGOs will be able to do so with less resources, money and staff?

### 1. Benefits of bottom up/participatory:

- Uses local knowledge.
- Reflects community interests and priorities.
- Builds ownership and self-reliance.

### 2. Constraints of bottom - up/participatory:

- Intensive (staff resources).
- Had to change attitudes from top-down to bottom up.
- Difficult –especially large scale.
- Lack of ideas.
- Raises expectations.
- Can be time consuming and unproductive.
- Considered to be slow.

### 3. Top down versus bottom up/participatory:

- Consultation is essential
- Programs developed consistent with communities’ priorities.

#### **But MAFF has limited extension capacity:**

- Not enough staff resources/experience for bottom up participatory programs.

### 4. **Conclusion:** for the short term and for the service delivery to the largest number of farmers:

- More top-down ‘packaged’ approach may be more appropriate for MAFF.

Other agencies will need to weigh up the benefits and challenges associated with bottom up approaches:

- Based on their resource

From Power Point presentation by Oxfam-led research team presented in Dili, May 2004. Lessons Learned in Implementing Community Level Agriculture and NRM Projects.

### ***Community targeting***

Not only do international agencies dictate the level of community consultation required, but they also decide which groups within the community they consider important for targeting. So while at one level, donors present the image of practicing participatory development in their project funding requirements (for example, consultations with communities), the participation is only partial as they are deciding which groups in the community are important and worthy of helping. For example, during the transition stage, bilateral donors narrowed their targets to specific community groups (for example gender, youth, and the disabled) and donors became more specific in their criteria for funding. In regard to the specific targeting of groups by international agencies, these targets were not always appropriate or what the community recognised as important target groups. A sentiment expressed by a local NGO worker was “sometimes they [international agencies] want the men to be involved in the things when they don’t want to be involved or the women” (KI.21).

Neither are international organisations always clear about what they want (Box 5.4), or with whom they want to work (Box.5.5). Donor organisations can afford to ‘pick and choose’ and have the power and the authority to do so, but few seem to understand the implications of their actions on local NGOs. As a local NGO worker, with a wide range of experience working with several different local NGOs and internationals commented “they [internationals] say they want something one way then they want it another way, or they say they will give us funding and then they say they can’t but we have already done a lot of planning — the budget and proposal — which is a lot of work and we don’t get paid” (KI.21). The ambiguous nature of some proposal guidelines, and in some cases specific directions or objectives of some international organisations can prove baffling for some local NGOs which, coupled with the language barriers described above, can prove debilitating for NGO activities.

### **6.10 Unequal Relationships, Networking and Communication**

The strong expatriate community forms the basis of a strong network system for those working in the aid industry at all levels, but few locals have access to this. Much of the networking is on an informal basis, information being shared and passed on over meals or coffee, or during exercise sessions. Local staff on local wages cannot afford to frequent the same places as foreign workers do, nor do they generally mix in the same social groups or share the same language and worldview.



Internationals come from many different countries but most speak English either as a first or second language and share the position of being in a foreign country in a support and assistance delivery capacity.

The repercussions for NGOs can mean that they are excluded from the information loop at an informal level, particularly if they do not have an international working with them. They are not only restricted in opportunities to contribute and comment on important issues in informal arenas but often miss out on opportunities for contracts, tenders and proposals that they might be able to access.

### **6.11 Transition Issues**

May 2004 marked the end of the UN peace-keeping mission in Timor-Leste and it also marked the beginning of a new development phase for the aid industry. With the post-emergency phase officially over, many international NGOs began leaving Timor-Leste while others, including bilaterals, and multilaterals began to apply much stricter accountability requirements on local NGOs and became much more specific in the groups being targeted<sup>30</sup>. As a result of these changes funding became increasingly difficult to obtain and reporting and accountability procedures became much more stringent, particularly for small, local NGOs like KBH.

In 2004 many small NGOs like KBH were going through difficult times (as outlined towards the end of Chapter Five and not dissimilar to the scenarios in Boxes 5.4 – 5.6). Some were better prepared for the transition while others, without international partner support, struggled to make ends meet and many collapsed or disappeared. Many diversified their core work and took on different roles.

### **6.12 Conclusion**

The post-conflict/post-emergency environment of aid and development in Timor-Leste brought a new set of external conditions to bear on local NGOs such as KBH and their staff. As a result KBH, in attempting to adapt to this new environment, whilst staying committed to its overall vision, mission and goals, faced several major internal challenges. Firstly, they needed to adapt to the difficulties and complexities introduced by the new national languages, not to mention those popularly introduced by the various donor bodies operating in the new aid environment. To add to this, new technologies were rapidly introduced that were beyond the ability of staff as well as beyond their financial capacity to maintain. With these changes, new expectations by donors about forms of communication arose, placing further burdens on local NGOs.

The scale of the rehabilitation program (not to mention the speed with which it was introduced) and its ever-changing form - emergency to post-emergency to long-term development - also exacerbated problems relating to staffing and skill shortages each of which greatly impacted upon the effective functioning of local NGOs. KBH, with little technical support and meagre finances, in the changing environment, found itself having to compete with larger local NGOs, international NGOs and Government bodies which could afford to train staff, offer larger salaries, job security and other benefits. This of course made retaining good staff difficult and training inexperienced staff fruitless as they would inevitably go to the highest bidder as soon as they gathered the appropriate skill set.

NGOs such as KBH also found themselves working in an environment at this time which overwhelmingly used styles of management and systems of finance and administration relatively foreign to them. This not only made 'acclimatisation' a slow and difficult process but was often directly opposed to popular ways of working such as using aspects of the familial system in the work place. Staff faced the difficulty of going against the grain of their own familial system and suffered the suspicion that their usual way of working was somehow corrupt or devious.

The external challenges of the new post-conflict/post-emergency transitioning into the long-term development environment often had the effect that staff and organisations would alter behaviour and organisational processes to remain competitive in this new environment. KBH exemplified this process in their response to changing external conditions. Staff sought to rapidly acquire new language and technological skills so that they could communicate with donors and stay abreast of changes in their sector. At an organisational level, the NGO adopted new financial management, employment and administration systems to meet with the prevailing expectations of potential donors. They also modified traditional forms of governance and organisational management that were considered inappropriate or impractical in the prevailing environment and augmented others where appropriate.

At the same time, NGOs, primarily staffed by volunteers and largely operating as not for profit organisations, faced the problem of catering to the more particular demands of the donor bodies. There can be little doubt that the availability of funding greatly impacts the reach and effectiveness of NGO project implementation and organisational functions, whatever the community and whatever the scope. For the NGO, the availability of money directly translates to the availability of time and resources to properly plan projects, pay staff to implement them, provide knowledge

and training to prepare them, and to fund the equipment to carry the projects out. The opportunity to obtain this funding is, however, not necessarily related to an NGO's capacity to do the work it sets itself in its organisational vision, mission and goals.

Instead, the specifications of the particular funding body with which the NGO forms a donor relation and an NGO's ability (or inability) to comply with these stipulations, determine whether or not they will obtain funding and the way in which they must conduct themselves to retain funding. As KBH moved into closer contact with the aid world during the transition from post-emergency to long-term development it faced numerous challenges and went to extraordinary lengths to meet the expectations of donor organisations. Two examples include adapting receipts to meet the demands of the donor, as outlined in Box 6.3, and conducting expensive and time-consuming community consultations with limited hope of winning project funding as described in Boxes 5.5 and 5.6.

Perhaps more importantly, the pressures faced in meeting donor demands were more often met with a silent acquiescence on the part of the NGO to change or shape itself in accordance with donor demands or objectives. Here the NGO faces not just the threat of funding cuts but the overwhelming sense that the way that the donor wants things done is the 'right' or 'proper' way to do them. In this context, the NGO meets the challenges by shaping (or attempting to shape) itself to fit a prescribed model, a model of an NGO that is perceived in this environment to be the 'successful' or 'correct' model of an NGO.

In the following chapter these same challenges are explored from a different perspective – an outsider's view.

# **Chapter Seven**

## **Different Perspective, Different Lens**

### **7.1 Introduction**

This chapter summarises the data gathered from interviews with international workers on their perceptions of the major internal challenges faced by local NGOs in the post-conflict post-emergency environment and in their partnerships and relations with international agencies and aid organisations. Similar to Chapter Six, the data are discussed under two central themes. First, the perceived internal challenges faced by a local NGO in meeting the requirements/conditions/regulations of international donors and adapting to an environment dominated by externally imposed conditions are addressed. Second, interface issues, the perceived challenges faced by local NGOs in negotiating partnerships and relationships with international donor agencies and aid organisations are discussed. While Chapter Six was an insider's view, this chapter presents an outsider's perspective of the same situation<sup>31</sup>.

### **7.2 Internal Challenges**

While there is an obvious blurring between what is an internal issue and what is an external (interface), issue I have maintained these two categories in this Chapter as in Chapter Six because the answers given by respondents were largely in response to two central questions: 1) what do you see are the major internal challenges faced by local NGOs (in the post-conflict, post-emergency environment); and 2) what do you see are the major issues for local NGOs in working with international agencies and aid organisations.

The responses by interviewees to the first question, like the responses of local respondents, were strongly grouped around, staffing issues (nepotism in particular), the lack of strong leadership, lack of experienced and skilled staff, and the lack of strong financial management and administration practices. While only two respondents spoke of language as a major problem, it is included here as a sub-heading because, for local respondents it was perceived as one of the major issues that they had to deal with, while for outsiders it was not perceived as such.

Each of these issues is discussed below under the following and sub-headings.

- Adaptation to new languages and technologies;

- Staffing issues: lack of skilled and experienced staff; over-employment of family and friends;
- Governance issues: Lack of strong and experienced leadership; and
- Lack of strong financial management and administration systems.

### **7.3      Adaptation to New Languages and Technologies**

#### ***Language***

As mentioned above, while language issues were one of the major problems faced by local staff on a daily basis in navigating the aid world, only three international respondents out of 15 interviewed, touched on language issues as a significant problem for local NGOs. One of the international respondents recognised that for local staff having to operate in an environment where the key players (internationals) write and speak in a foreign language, writing proposals and networking is a major problem (KI.5). The second respondent observed that without a shared language, good communication was difficult. The third respondent worked for a large local NGO and was much more aware of the difficulties that language issues presented for local people. All three were sympathetic to the problems of local staff having to operate in languages of which they had limited knowledge.

International respondents' lack of perception of language as a major problem for local NGOs may simply reflect a different worldview or 'alternative reality'. For the majority of English speaking foreigners language is not a major issue because English is an accepted working language in Timor and the language of the aid industry, to which they belong. Few foreigners, apart from international volunteers such as the US Peace Corp, Australian Youth Ambassadors or Australian Volunteers international<sup>32</sup>, work for small local NGOs, though many of these volunteers go on to fill positions with international aid organisations and multilateral and bilateral agencies.

Most internationals do not need to understand or translate documents or write documents in a foreign language. At international meetings and events there are interpreters. At lower level meetings, if foreigners are present, the meeting is usually conducted in English and translated into Tetun or Indonesian. Few internationals really get to understand, even at a superficial level as I did in my first days in Timor as expressed in Box 6.1, the constraints, frustrations and limitations of working in a foreign language.

### Box 7-1 Lost in translation

One of the things I did as a preparation for fieldwork in Timor-Leste was to take Indonesian language classes for a year before I left. I knew from my previous visit in 2002 that while Indonesian was considered by many to be the language of occupation, it was also the language that most of the younger population were schooled in and many of the young student activists who were involved with KBH, GFFTL and SIL went to university in Indonesia. I would have preferred to learn Tetun, which is the most widely spoken local language in Timor-Leste, but classes were not available in Perth at that time. When I arrived back in Timor-Leste in April 2004, despite the classes, my Indonesian was limited to 'slow', simple conversations and my Tetun was non-existent.

On my first morning at KBH, I was invited to attend the weekly staff meeting, the first of many I would attend over the next 15 months. Those present included all the local staff. Of the local staff at that time only the administration worker and one of the expressional arts trainers spoke limited English. The meeting was conducted generally in Indonesian but would often switch to Tetun borrowing Portuguese and Indonesian words to explain more technical terms. It fell upon the admin assistant to translate the proceedings for me. When I wanted to add something, she would translate this into a mixture of Indonesian and Tetun and feed it back to the group.

The day was hot and humid, and the eight of us were sitting in the small main office of KBH with one fan oscillating ineffectually beneath a desk. The meeting went on for over two and a half hours as information, questions and answers were translated backwards and forwards. As the morning progressed the translations became shorter and shorter and my concentration decreased as did my interest in asking questions as they simply prolonged the session.

I was experiencing firsthand a little of what local people endure on a daily basis in their communications with the aid world, the frustration of having to rely on others to interpret what is being said and depending on them to correctly transmit your message to the group; the tedium of hours spent in meetings as each sentence is translated; the often gradual retreat into a state of childlike passivity which requires only that you smile once in a while as you sit through something you can only guess at understanding and to which you can make only limited contributions; and the denial of being able to express yourself in an intellectual conversation in the language you are most competent and comfortable in and the one that reflects your culture and your identity in all its cadences, nuances, rhythms, traditions and meaning.

While some international workers try to learn Tetun, the majority of international workers are not fluent in Tetun. This is particularly the case for career aid professionals working for multilateral and bilateral agencies, who regularly move from one country to another as needs arise and missions end. While many international aid organisation workers, particularly those who stay in-country for some years, do attempt to learn Tetun, it remains the exception rather than the rule.

Language as argued in Chapter Six can also act as a gate keeping device and can reinforce unequal relationships where the dominant culture imposes a language that local people in particular cannot take part in, so again those with the least resources are most disadvantaged.

### ***Information technologies***

While two respondents spoke of language difficulties, not one respondent spoke of the challenges of new technologies for local groups. Again this probably reflects a lack of knowledge and understanding, and 'lived in reality'. In my experience local people do not complain about these issues, but rather, silently acquiesce as described in Chapter Six and try to adapt their work patterns around these issues. Many international staff therefore are not cognisant of, or fail to recognise the challenges and difficulties faced by local people in their navigation around these obstacles.

## **7.4 Staffing and Recruitment Practices**

In contrast to internationals' lack of perception of language and technology as major barriers to working with local NGOs, the issue that drew by far the most response from respondents revolved around staffing and recruitment. The main problems identified in the interviews were:

- The tendency to employ relatives and friends (about one-third of NGOs are managed either by a family or a group of close relatives (Belum, NGO capacity assessment study, 2005). In most cases relatives and friends were under-skilled for their duties and their employment left skill gaps in the organisation as well as adding to the difficulty of managing performance within the organisation (KI.12, KI.5, KI.6, KI.2); and
- A high turnover of staff which made the building of consistent management and administration structures difficult (KI.9).

In discussing recruitment practices, Informant KI.5 made an important point regarding recruitment in a country with low education levels and skill shortages, namely that a person may lack the essential skill set or formal education for the job but may still have the potential to be capacity-built into the job. Therefore, in recruiting people, the focus should be on their capacity to learn rather than what they know already. People without the potential to learn high-level skills and knowledge cannot but fail (KI.5). Attempting to identify potential staff with the latent capacity to learn new skills is missing in some recruiting processes (KI.2). Both KI.5

and KI.2 emphasised the necessity for good recruitment practices. However, effective recruitment procedures require experience and skill, and in an environment with few experienced workers, the problem is exacerbated and leads to inexperienced people hiring inexperienced people. The recruitment process is further hampered in a post-conflict environment by the fact that, while an applicant might be suitable for the job and have the capacity to do it well, historical factors such as prior allegiances in conflict may mean the person is not suited to that organisation (such as those described in Box 5.2).

Another issue not generally recognised by international respondents was the continuous drain of local staff into international organisations and agencies. However, one respondent did mention the unfairness of the wage discrepancy between local NGO staff and local staff working for internationals (KI.4) (see Chapter Six). This respondent felt that local NGOs were placed in a difficult situation as they could not actively and fairly compete for staff with international organisations. KI.4 was also concerned that those local staff who were forced to take on two or three jobs simultaneously were unfairly branded by international workers as having “too many fingers in too many pies” which detracted from their work at their primary workplace. KI.4 argued that this branding was unfair in an environment which denied local staff a living wage and forced them to take on multiple roles simply to provide for their families.

The reliance of local NGOs on international staff working for them to represent their interests was not mentioned as an internal or staffing issue by the respondents. Rather several respondents saw this as an issue relating to legitimacy. This is discussed further below under ‘interface issues’.

## **7.5 Governance**

### ***Lack of experienced leadership and management***

Several respondents (KI.5, KI.6) recognised the lack of strong experienced management structures as major issues for local NGOs, while others focused on what they saw as the lack of strong leadership (KI.4, KI.6, KI.14). No respondent talked directly about how local NGOs were structured and what the role of an NGO Advisory Board, or Board of management, was within local NGOs. Rather, issues were generally discussed in terms of the lack of strong leadership, convoluted decision-making practices, and the lack of strategic focus. From the perspective of KI.11, weak leadership led to a lack of focus and prioritisation of aims and objectives



that resulted in an emphasis on “chas[ing] donor dollars” instead of adhering to organisation objectives. This view is perhaps unrealistic in an environment where local NGOs are forced to chase dollars to survive. It could be argued that those NGOs best able to chase dollars are the most successfully led. The lack of strong leadership or perhaps the lack of understanding who the leaders were, made it difficult for donors to understand how decisions were being made and to whom they should respond (KI.4).

Other comments related to leadership represented by an adherence to traditional, hierarchical top-down decision-making processes where the ‘head person’ was seen as the boss and therefore decision processes were unquestionable (KI.6, KI.14). This style of leadership was believed by KI.6 to be a major problem for local NGOs and had the effect of blocking “motivation and imagination”. KI.6 also recognised that this style of leadership often meant that money was shared by family members within an organisation which again blocked individual motivation to achieve but had the benefit of ensuring that families survived (in Box 5.4).

In my own observations of leadership styles within KBH, I noted a style of leadership somewhere between what Foucault (see Chapter Four), would describe as ‘pastoral care’ (the shepherd makes decisions on behalf of the flock, for the good of the flock) and ‘discipline’ (subjects characters are moulded to ensure compliance) in both cases placing a great deal of responsibility for the entire organisation upon the shoulders of the coordinator in particular, which put her under a great deal of stress (as emphasised in Box 6.2), and the Board members to a lesser extent. This style of leadership often led the coordinator to take responsibility away from staff members by not sharing information and decision making with them, which left them feeling disempowered and angry, but at the same time she ensured that everyone received enough money on which to live.

Elaborating on the traditional leadership style as experienced in rural areas, KI.14, an experienced multilateral agency worker who spoke fluent Tetun, and who had been working in the districts for over a year, and was also engaged in research on peace building for a bilateral agency, also described it as a “top-down style of working” adding that “if leaders are strong and fair they can have a positive effect but in Timor now [after the Indonesian occupation] the local leaders are not strong” (KI.14). The respondent also observed that there were many individuals in Timor with the capacity to be strong leaders, but in the rural areas particularly, there were not enough local leaders left, as many of these people had gone to Dili to find work.

None of the international respondents commented on the issue of governance directly, or how governance related to prescribed organisational structures, that is, the coordinator being responsible and accountable to the Board of Directors or similar external governing body who are in turn responsible for ensuring compliance and transparency within the organisation. Leadership was viewed, almost entirely, as the responsibility of the manager or coordinator of the organisation.

## **7.6 Administration and Financial Management**

A lack of experienced and skilled financial management was seen by many as a major problem for local NGOs (KI.5, KI.6, KI.2, KI.11, KI.9). Comments related to the lack of skilled reporting and acquittal processes, and weak financial management skills by local NGOs in particular, which led to gaps in reporting and anomalies in financial statements (KI.6, KI.5). However, only one interviewee, referring to a small number of local NGOs, related the financial anomalies to a deliberate misuse of funds (KI.11). Nearly all respondents, however, related these issues to poor staffing and recruitment practices which led to the employment of under-skilled and inexperienced staff (KI.5, KI.6, KI.2, KI.11, and KI.9).

## **7.7 Summary**

Internal issues were summed up very concisely by the respondents under the above headings and were plainly a response to their own contact with local NGOs, on a daily basis. While most were sympathetic to the difficulties of local NGOs only one respondent placed the perceived 'internal' issues within the larger post-conflict/post-emergency context or expanded on why, for example, the skill shortage existed from an historical view point. Adaptation to new language and technology challenges also went relatively unnoticed and was not understood. This lack of perception and analysis of such fundamentally difficult challenges for local people is not necessarily indicative of a lack of thought or interest on the part of respondents but of an outsider's perspective. They simply responded to the questions asked with what they had encountered. I did not ask at that time why they thought the skill shortages existed, or how difficult they thought working in a foreign language and adapting to new technologies might be for local NGOs. The failure on my part to raise these questions is interesting in itself, and is perhaps indicative of my own level of immersion in the field obscuring my view of the bigger picture at the time. It was only once I had removed myself from the immediate environment and started to think around the issues I had identified from my observations and participation, and from discussions with local people, that I came to see them in a more rounded way.

Nearly all, so called, ‘internal’ issues related directly to coming to terms with externally imposed pressures including language difficulties, the lack of good governance (as defined by external bodies), the lack of sound financial and administrative skills (as defined by external bodies), and the over-tendency to hire family and friends, all of which related back to the chronic shortage of skilled people.

## **7.8 Interface Issues**

While the first part of this chapter has covered responses to questions relating to internal challenges for local NGOs, the following section examines the responses around a second question which focuses on the contact point between the international aid world and local NGOs. The responses in this section demonstrate a much more mindful and knowledgeable understanding of the difficulties faced by local NGOs in working with international agencies and organisations which the respondents essentially represented. The sub-headings for this section are similar to the ones defined in Chapter 6:

- Fitting existing ideologies to new externally imposed ideologies;
- Donor dependency;
- Relationships between local and international staff;
- Transition Issues; and
- Communication issues.

## **7.9 Fitting Existing Ideologies to New Externally Imposed Ideologies**

Few respondents spoke directly about the issues relating to ideologies and imposing Western or foreign models over local ones. However, KI.13 went as far as to say that some “Western workers” did not understand the Timor-Leste culture, were not interested in trying to understand it, and that many programs run rough-shod over local interests – their mission being to deliver their own project in their own way.

KI.13 spoke fluent Tetun and had worked in several of the rural areas of Timor-Leste and felt that donor pressures from outside the country often dictated what was done inside the country whether or not it was what Timorese people really wanted. This situation, KI.13 argued, left local people no option but to “play the game” and in turn use their skills to get what they wanted for their families and their client groups. This game playing gave the illusion that local people were willing to do anything to get funding, but underneath this façade, they were capable of achieving their own goals which may or may coincide with those of the international donors.

Another respondent also talked about a similar issue in discussing the difficulties faced by people working with two different worldviews (local and international); K1.6 commented that, while both may have shared goals and expectations, quite often the direction and methods for achieving them are different and can be hard to negotiate as the indicators of success don't match. As Box 7.2 illustrates, local people are not passive accepters of all international ideas and actions but are active players, capable of managing the situation to their own advantage, and to meet their own goals and objectives.

#### **Box 7-2 Meeting the same goals in different ways**

In late December 2004, as part of KBH's application to APHEDA for bridging money to cover operational funding until June 2005, KBH undertook to do a survey with market women and phone-card sellers to see what training they needed to assist them to improve their income security. As the training adviser I saw this activity not only as an opportunity to improve the incomes of market women and phone-card sellers but an opportunity for the staff to learn how to do a 'training needs analysis' with a target group, and from the data gathered decide 'when', 'where', 'how' and 'with whom' to do 'what' training. The staff were enthusiastic and we started by compiling a questionnaire that would result in quantifiable data from which we could graph trends and ultimately prioritise needs and wants regarding type, time and place of training. We also went over interview skills and then the six interviewers went off in pairs to the three market locations and into the streets to do the interviews.

Meanwhile I worked with another staff member on constructing a simple data base into which we could put the raw data and produce summary graphs and tables. As the interviewers came in with the data we entered it in to the data base and almost immediately interesting findings started to emerge. For one, the market women appeared to be unusually well educated - at least in comparison to the national education levels - most had some secondary school education. Another finding was that they were quite young relative to the women I had seen in the markets, and this seemed odd. The phone-card sellers were all male and predominantly young which was in keeping with street observations of this cohort. However, like the market women, they were mostly well educated. Another question that yielded what I saw as an odd response was whether or not the women preferred training without the men. The answer was predominantly 'no'. By far the most desired training was English language training and computer training.

When the research was over, we all sat together and looked at the data and I pointed out what, to me, looked like unusual findings but nobody made any comments. After prioritising the training we decided, looking at the numbers, to run two classes of English language and two of computing for 60 participants, 15 in each class. The classes would be run early in the morning and late in the day as requested in the surveys.

On the morning of the first session of training, I walked into the classroom expecting to see a group of market women. Instead, it was a group of what seemed like university students, which in fact it was, as I established after further enquiries.

Continued

Talking with the staff, I managed to find out what had happened. Apparently, when they went to the market the women said that they didn't want any more training. They wanted their older children to learn English so they could get a job. Nor did they want training just for women, they wanted their sons included.

Technically, most of the participants who attended the training were connected to the market women in some way through a relative or friend. Whatever their connection, they wanted and felt they needed the training and nearly every training session was full. Nobody was paid to attend, neither was food or transport provided. Some participants made small donations for their attendance. All KBH staff were aware of what was happening.

In the end, KBH's goal was to assist market women to achieve greater economic security. The market women believed that by sending their adult children to English classes they were ensuring that their children had the best access to jobs and through them, their own economic security was assured. While the indicators for the success of the project may have been skewed, the results were nevertheless excellent in terms of what the market women valued and wanted to achieve.

A credit to the APHEDA coordinator at the time was that she saw this as a positive rather than a negative outcome: that is to say that people who wanted and valued English language training and did not have access to it, whether market women or not, were able to take advantage of the training.

Another positive aspect of this scenario for KBH was that many of the students became voluntarily involved in the expressional arts project and as such became involved in delivering community health and well-being messages 'Timor style' in Dili and surrounding villages.

These types of outcomes (as in Box 7.2) do not always fit so easily with international donors as they did with APHEDA.

### **7.10 Donor Dependency**

Donor dependency is one of the fundamental issues for local NGOs and this is openly recognised by international aid workers. In an environment dominated by international aid and development agencies and organisations, as one experienced interviewee noted, local NGOs cannot survive without international funds (KI.3). This circumstance, KI.3 notes, pressures local NGOs to fit themselves to the donor criteria for funding which "skews the way things are done and what the priorities are" (KI.3). The skewing process relates to the shaping process for example a local NGO must apply to its own objectives and outcomes and even to the choice of target group, to fit the needs of the donor. To obtain funding most local NGOs have little choice but to engage in this process and during the transition stage this pressure increases even more (KI.3, KI.9, KI.12). The question is how far should that process go? This was a question KBH was forced to continually ask itself as demonstrated in Boxes 5.4, 5.5, 5.6.

For most local NGOs dependent on international funds, there is no clear answer and most find themselves in a balancing act running the risk, no matter what they do, of being judged negatively. One interviewee, a bilateral agency Head, viewed a readiness to adapt to donor needs as a lack of managerial and leadership focus, claiming that local NGOs “in trying to do too many things, would change projects to match donor criteria and didn’t know what to specialise in” (KI.11). Another bilateral agency Head summed up the issue in perhaps a more pragmatic way by seeing it as a “delicate balancing act”. The challenge for the local NGO was to be broad enough in their diversification to meet the donor criteria, yet specialised enough to be good at what they do (KI.12). Both views highlight the problem that local NGOs are often at the mercy of the whims of the donor bodies and must engage in this precarious balancing act to survive - but it is an act where the weights and measures keep on changing.

#### **7.11 Relationships between International and Local Organisations and Staff**

Most interviewees were open and frank about the limitations and weaknesses in the work practices of international donors and staff in relationship to their work with local NGOs. KI.13 noted, international NGOs “have too much money but not enough planning” and as a consequence of this there was pressure to achieve results quickly without enough concern for local interests. This assertion was backed up by KI.14 and KI.15, while KI.5 added that international NGOs often take advantage of local NGOs to reach communities but then do not provide enough funding to cover the costs (a negative aspect of partnership engagement felt by KBH in its negotiations with a multilateral agency as described in Box 5.4).

Another interviewee talked about how the bureaucratic arm of their organisation was hampering their ability to work closely with the community (NGOs). On the one hand, strict accountability procedures were enforced while on the other hand, not enough time and resources were allowed for capacity building and supporting local NGOs to increase their capacity to deal with the change (KI.9). This situation left project staff, those working with local NGOs, in the difficult situation of explaining to local NGOs that the organisation was in Timor-Leste to assist them and to reach the community but the system they worked within was making that difficult if not impossible to do. Box 6.3 exemplifies the consequences for KBH, as a small NGO, coming up against the bureaucratic arm of a multilateral agency and the inflexibility of such systems. KBH had very limited power to argue their position or to negotiate an early resolution to the problem. Despite implementing a successful project, as

judged by the MLA project staff, KBH would have collapsed financially if not for financial support from APHEDA.

It was not only systemic problems within major institutions that international staff were critical of, but also the pressure that was exerted on international staff to “toe the agency line”. Again, an interviewee was openly frank in talking about the pressure international staff were under in their role as the intermediaries between their donor organisation and the local NGOs. This sense of frustration is summed up by KI.13, who observed that “many international aid workers are frustrated by the system” in that “they were asked [by their organisations] to do one thing, but forced to do another” in order to reach targets imposed by out of country management (KI.13). The observations of both KI.9 and KI.13 concur with McKechnie’s (2004) contention, pointing to World Bank research on outcomes for countries recovering from conflict, that “Donor country policymakers [out of country] rarely understand either the project planning, design, procurement, delivery and construction process or the institutional constraints of project implementation”.

Both KI.5 and KI.9 observed that there was a high turnover of international staff which led to poor capacity building with local NGOs as they had “little time to get to know locals and to build rapport with them”. There was general agreement by several interviewees that like local NGOs experiencing high staff turnovers in some situations, inexperienced international staff were promoted above their skill and experience level. As a consequence, inexperienced people were often placed in decision making roles where the results of their decisions might have dramatic impacts on the lives of local people

## **7.12 Transition Issues**

In describing the stages of long-term development, KI.12, the Head of a major bilateral agency, described the stage as one where funding requirements were much stricter and more focused on specific targets and those who obtained funds must account much more thoroughly for their project expenditures and meet set indicators. While each phase had its own rules, regulations and staff, there were no formal procedures for assisting local NGOs through the transition from one phase to another. The situation was further complicated by new international staff who were struggling themselves to come to terms with new conditions and regulations (KI.12). KI.9 noted that the new phase also put greater stresses on international staff who were not given enough time to identify and fix problems, find solutions, or to build the capacity of local NGOs to meet the new stricter criteria.



Interviewees from across the spectrum of donor organisations and agencies agreed that the transition into long-term development, although not clearly defined in the same way by every organisation, meant greater pressures on local organisations to conform to stricter funding criteria and accountability procedures and to fit within a much narrower and more specific target band (KI.9, KI.12, KI.2, KI.3, KI.5, KI.6). All agreed that these stricter regulations would put local NGOs under much greater stress but few organisations had put in place a plan for assisting local NGOs to negotiate this new stage.

In terms of the 'balancing act', the weights and measures are dramatically changed again. Local NGOs are left to navigate their way through this new phase largely unaided, with few sign posts and many road blocks.

### **7.13 Summary of Findings**

The majority of respondents were openly critical of many of the internal leadership and management practices of local NGOs, particularly as they related to the recruitment of staff, the lack of strong leadership and management, and poor financial management and accountability. While they generally related most of these issues to an inevitable outcome of a largely poorly skilled population, there was only limited analysis of these issues in relation to the post-conflict, post-emergency environment. There was even less recognition that these internal issues, in many instances, emerged directly as a response to externally imposed conditions and regulations, that is, management and organisation structures and financial and administrative accountability systems. The lack of questioning and analysis of these systems seemed to suggest that the majority of respondents saw these systems as 'givens' - part of what local NGOs should conform to without question. Indeed, it would be a rare international aid and development professional who would question such things as open and transparent financial accountability and compliant and transparent management and leadership. However, in accepting these systems and structures as 'givens', there is no room for indigenous or local practices to emerge or to be considered. It also places local NGOs in the spotlight in terms of justifying their activities and actions, while there are few checks and balances on international agencies and organisations and evaluation in terms of compliance and accountability.

In terms of external pressures and donor interface issues, most respondents were equally open but more mindful and reflective about the pressures on local NGOs to conform to donor expectations and criteria without adequate support, financial and



otherwise, from donors. Many were also critical of international donor organisations, for their lack of understanding of local issues - particularly when inappropriate decisions were made outside the country, leaving in-country staff to carry them out, and failing to leave adequate time for international staff to build strong relationships with local NGOs. They were also critical of international donors for wasting money on inappropriate activities, discounting local knowledge and skills, running roughshod over local NGOs by making use of local NGOs, without providing adequate support for them and pressuring local NGOs to conform with funding criteria determined 'outside' the country.

In discussing the transition stage specifically, bilateral and multilateral staff, as well as international aid staff, recognised that there was much greater pressure during this time, on local NGOs to fit donor criteria, and that their own agencies often lacked adequate procedures for assisting local NGOs through the transition. In some agencies this situation was exacerbated by increased internal pressures to achieve results and to adhere to specific targeted areas. Interviewees were also cognisant of the fact that the high turnover of international staff and the time constraints on international project workers inhibited the proper capacity building of local staff during this time.

The findings from interviews with international aid and development practitioners, as presented above, are both interesting and enlightening and provide a different understanding and view of issues and challenges faced by local NGOs in the development environment. While there are local NGOs in Timor-Leste that have a 'voice' that is heard, many work in relative silence adapting and adjusting their work practices and criteria to meet the needs of donors without realising that other local NGOs are also experiencing the same difficulties. Just as it is a rare international aid and development professional who would question the model, few local NGOs can afford to question it. To do so and to work outside it would be to cut themselves off from the supply of funds.

The next chapter draws together the main findings of the thesis and interprets them in relation to key ideas in the development literature as explored in Chapter Four.

# Chapter Eight

## The Invisible Barriers

### 8.1 Introduction

One of main purposes of the thesis was to identify and document the obstacles faced by a local NGO working in Timor-Leste. I did so with a view to informing those aid and development practitioners and researchers preparing to enter the field of the potential challenges faced, so they could better prepare themselves for the experience and, as a result, more effectively engage with local NGOs and local staff in meeting the needs of the local community. I did so largely under the assumption that what was missing from existing research was the information necessary to find solutions to the challenges and difficulties faced by NGOs.

Through the course of my research, however, I came to understand in a somewhat different light, some of the difficulties and challenges faced by local NGOs. In many cases, the major obstacles to the successful participation of an NGO in the post-conflict, post-emergency context of Timor-Leste were less tangible than the surface issues identified in the study (as outlined in Chapters Six and Seven). These less tangible, or invisible barriers, were not so much the product of mistaken action or obliviousness on the part of multilateral and bilateral agencies and international aid organisations or a lack of experience and ineptitude on behalf of local NGOs, but rather the outcome of deliberate and strategic actions of governance. Therefore, having knowledge of a NGO's struggles alone, as identified from a local perspective in Chapter Six and largely acknowledged by international workers in Chapter Seven, will not necessarily lead to these issues being corrected, even when all parties involved recognise the problems and are in agreement about a common course of action to address the problems (as illustrated in Box 6.3). The good intentions of international personnel will not necessarily translate into action or altered ways of working, even for senior people with a good grounding of the local cultures in which they work (as seen in the interviews with international workers).

The main purpose of the literature review in Chapter Four was to place the aid intervention in Timor-Leste within the larger framework of development and through the exploration of post-development writing and Foucauldian theories that challenge preconceived notions of development, power and governance. It then becomes possible to explore alternative ways of understanding the factors at play behind the

scenes of the challenges and obstacles faced by local NGOs as identified in chapters Five, Six and Seven. Attention is shifted away from what local NGOs 'need to do to become stronger,' to the factors which shape the reality of working life in Timor-Leste in ways seen and unseen and which are perhaps seldom evident in the examination of individual problems and singular encounters. I argue that it is these underlying factors behind the presenting 'obstacle/challenge' that are the real barriers to the successful participation of local NGOs in the post-conflict, post-emergency environment.

The following discussion firstly highlights the theoretical frameworks explored in Chapter Four which will be used to discuss the 'undercurrents' that permeate and flow through all action and thinking within the aid environment in Timor-Leste. Using language as a starting point, the discussion then explores how thought, action and ideology are governed and controlled by the subtle mechanisms of liberal governance in the aid environment, which often renders those in discord with that model, both local and international actors, powerless and frustrated (or fighting a faceless tiger as described in Chapter Four). The chapter also explores the ways in which a small, local independent NGO becomes tied into a global system and what that means for the organisation in terms of what it must concede and what it can keep of its own identity in the various partnerships it makes with the international world.

## **8.2 Theoretical Framework**

The first section of the literature review in Chapter Four sought to place the aid intervention in Timor-Leste within the larger framework of development by gaining a broad understanding of the historical, political, social and economic underpinnings of the international aid industry or the apparatus of development. In doing so it determined that the 'apparatus' was underpinned by western liberal ideologies which informed both its economic rationalist policies as well as its neoliberal forms of governance in terms of aid and development assistance and humanitarian intervention. It also found that despite its 'failures', the apparatus of development was continually able to repair and transform itself in order to maintain its control of not only the targets (countries, communities and individuals) and the activities and interventions related to aid and development but also the thinking and discourse around development.

The second section of the literature review, through an exploration of post-development writings, attempted to break free of that thinking and to take apart the

dominant western liberal model of development, particularly in terms of its operations in Timor-Leste. This was done not only to analyse what was happening there but to imagine other possibilities and ways of thinking and acting within that environment. More significantly the literature review offers, through Foucault's theory of liberalism as a technique or rationality of government, a way of critiquing the aid industry without seeing it as necessarily negative or repressive. For example, 'good governance' is not necessarily a bad thing, on the contrary clear, open and ethical lines of operation are positive characteristics of good management and leadership. It is the unseen conditions and regulations of action and behaviour embedded within the notion of 'good governance', that are at the centre of this investigation, i.e. if you do not fit this model/criteria then you will not get this funding.

Also at the centre of the investigation is the way language is used as a mechanism or technique of liberal governance in aid and development interventions as part of an enculturation process. As described in Chapter Four, when the aid world makes an intervention, such as in Timor-Leste, it must not only restore peace but install democratic government and governance. It cannot do this by force but by systematically persuading local people that they are now included in decision-making and power distribution and indeed in control of their own conduct.

Lastly, the literature review sought to define the role of local NGOs themselves within the international aid and development world. It sought to determine: 1) how local NGOs are linked to the external/global market; 2) the agendas behind the 'partnerships' that international aid organisations, multilaterals and bilateral agencies forge with local NGOs; 3) how international governments indirectly govern local NGOs by directing ODA funds through their own international NGOs; and 4) how international NGOs, bilateral and multilateral agencies, legitimate to their donors (public and private), their own role in aid interventions in fragile states, through their partnerships with local NGOs.

### **8.3 Language as a Mechanism of Governance**

Language, as illustrated in Chapters Six and Seven, is both an important cultural determinant and a powerful technological tool which can be wielded effectively to both include and exclude development actors, particularly by those with the power and motivation to do so. The issue of language, however, has much deeper and wider meaning and implications in the aid world as explored in Chapter Four, because of its links to power and governance. Here, language can be used in another sense, as a powerful mechanism for shaping and guiding the way people,

communities and societies think, feel and act. In this way language can be seen directly as a tool of government or a strategy for 'conducting conduct' for strategic purposes. To this end language, in a Foucauldian sense (see Chapter Four), can be redefined, appropriated, and reconceptualised. Each of these processes is discussed below in reference to the Timor-Leste context.

### ***The redefinition, appropriation, and reconceptualisation of language***

Language in the aid world is different in meaning to its common usage. New ways of talking about things, and new ways of conceiving concepts are introduced.

Language is 'jargonised', familiarised and popularised so that everybody is talking and thinking the same, and writing in the same discourse. Therefore, the language that local organisations are required to learn, or to grapple with, is not simply English or another foreign language. Local people are also learning the language of development - the jargon, the 'buzzwords' - the language that will enable them to take part in the conversation about the recovery of their own country.

The 'new' language is also the language that a local NGO needs to work with to obtain funding from international donors. It is embedded in every proposal and guideline and it soon becomes part of the local lexicon, whether or not English has been learned as a language, or the words used actually have shared meaning. As local people become familiar with the jargon, and familiar with the language favoured, if not required, by donors, it also starts to seep into monitoring, evaluation and narrative reports. In the end it is easier for locals (as well as internationals as outlined in Box 8.1) to adopt the jargon rather than to explain a term that is in itself ambiguous.

#### **Box 8-1 The meaning minefield**

Many times in the field I was asked by local staff to explain a particular term, such as gender mainstreaming, or good governance, or to explain the difference between the endless array of outcomes, outputs, results, reached objectives, etc., which they had come across in an aid application or similar document, or a word which they could not find in the English dictionary. Or if they could find it, it had a vastly different meaning to what was intended in the document. I would try my best to make sense of the meaning for them, usually inadequately. They would then carry away a distorted idea of what that word or concept meant. Nevertheless, the word or concept would start to appear in the proposals and narrative reports they were writing and it would be used in conversations and during training sessions, sometimes with great emphasis.

The aid jargon starts to be used in local communications and ‘consultations’ with communities and soon it ‘trickles down’ until it becomes part of the lexicon of village life, at least in their relationships with the outside world.

The language or ‘jargon’ of development is not always new but often carefully chosen and appropriated from other sources. In this way liberalism as a form of governance embeds other sources of meaning to give ‘old’ language more power (O'Malley 1998). In many instances the ‘old’ language belonged to local/indigenous people themselves as it speaks of liberation, equality, empowerment - terms which embody ‘grassroots’ organisations (see KBH’s vision and mission statements in Chapter Five) and have strong, emotional ties to community. So it is that the language that once had local meaning is returned with new meanings and conditions attached. For example, ‘empowerment’ and ‘equality’ once used to denote freedom from an external oppressor are now more associated with internal ‘gender relationships’ and personal motivation and ambition.

Accordingly, in this new environment, words such as ‘community’, ‘participation’, and ‘partnership’ take on a life of their own and are used freely and compellingly in documents generated by multilateral and bilateral agencies and international aid organisations alike to describe their own relationships with local communities and organisations within the aid and development context. The familiarity of the words can be beguiling and appear to denote inclusivity, and, as Macgregor (2007) notes, could be mistaken as the language of grassroots organisations (see Chapter Four) and as such be difficult to reject. They appear, as O'Malley (1998) posits (see Chapter Four), to locate rule within the everyday lives of local people. In this way language as mechanism of liberal governance not only enlists support at a local level but embeds responsibility for the ‘conduct of conduct’ in the hands of local people, that is, as long as local NGOs and communities comply with the new conditions that are now attached to the appropriated and redefined language.

If for instance a local NGO is not seen to be acting responsibly or fails to comply with the principles of good governance, penalties apply. For example, they are cut from funding altogether as in the case of the NGOs that spoke out against Australia’s policy on Timor oil (Chapter Seven), or funding is withheld until they get it right (Box 6.1).

Language as a mechanism of governance also works in other ways in the aid world by playing a part in changing the way we think about things, rendering them

thinkable in a certain way. Complicated concepts such as 'development', 'peace' and 'community' are redefined, reworked into a language that makes these abstractions identifiable, measurable and therefore manageable. For example, previously concepts such as 'community' and 'freedom' were difficult to define in terms of a set of measurable aspects; rather they were an elusive combination of factors, circumstances and people. Now these concepts are defined as families, women, men, unemployed, special interest groups, etc., and we must interact with them and talk about them as such - how many women benefited from the project? What does your project do for unemployed people of the community? Just as post-development writers (Chapter Four) at the macro level argue that the discourse of development itself suddenly identified and defined 'The Third World' by labelling it 'underdeveloped', and as such rendering every aspect of the lives of 'Third World' people open to scrutiny, measurement, problematisation and ultimately intervention, the language of development on the ground at the micro level does a similar job.

In much the same way, the 'history' of a local organisation is redefined. It is no longer a history of its people and their struggle, the organisation itself and its story. There is a prescribed story for the aid world, and it is this story that appears in funding applications, evaluation documents and organisation profiles. Its gives an historical background, the organisation's vision, mission, objectives, aims, past work, target community, future plans and goals, training methodology, organisation management structure and financial accountability processes. In short, it is the story that any international donor would be familiar with and would expect to see if they were to contemplate entering into a partnership with a local NGO.

Instead of being a 'real' story, it becomes a set of quantifiable elements: it is the projects they have run, to what effect, with whom, how much money they spent, and how many people per dollar they have assisted. It is the building and the staff, the organisational structure and the list of international organisations they have worked with, or have been supported by in the past. It is the implications of dependability, reliability, effectiveness and passive adoption of the values and procedures of funding bodies that may be transferred through the description of each.

In this new description of an organisation everything is made to serve a purpose or it is excluded from the definition. Originally, KBH (through its founding organisations) was comprised of young radicals who fought for the liberation of their country and equality for its people. It was this factor that attracted APHEDA to the groups and that gave the groups their legitimacy. However, in the post-emergency environment

radicalism is no longer an attractive feature and to obtain bilateral support KBH had to reflect a new type of organisation and minimise its overt links to more 'radical' groups (in terms of the narrow definitions), or suffer the penalty of no funding (Chapter Six).

Every aspect of project design, community consultation, evaluation and monitoring also becomes quantifiable, reportable, a form, a list – a component of a logical framework matrix. This person was asked for permission, this building was rehabilitated, this child benefited in this way, this lesson was learned, – tick, tick, tick. As an international interviewee said in Chapter Seven, local communities learn to 'play the game'. Everyone working in aid learns to 'play the game'.

The 'unwritten ground rules' or 'sub texts' of the language of development and its uses as a tool and mechanism of governance, if not understood by a local NGO (and indeed the international staff who work with them or for them), can shape the NGO in ways that it does not understand and therefore cannot respond to. NGOs need to be educated about the way these systems operate so that they can decide what they want or do not want to change, or they can at least understand why they are being asked to conform to a certain way of working and decide whether or not it is worth the price.

#### **8.4 The Laying of One System over Another**

One of the driving factors in choosing the topic for my research revolved around my perception during my first visit to Timor-Leste in 2002, of the differences between the world of the aid worker and the lives of local people. In Chapter Three I introduced some aspects of what the aid world is like on the ground. In Chapter Two I also discussed the privileged position of international workers in Timor-Leste. Chapters Five, Six and Seven explored, directly and indirectly, a deeper view of both worlds. My intent was to highlight differences in the two worlds and the difficulties that are created when International aid practitioners and the organisations and agencies that they represent, fail to see these differences and why they exist. This lack of perception can lead to a 'blaming the victim' mentality. For instance, if there is a general perception among international workers that weak leadership is an issue for local NGOs, the assumption is born that Timorese people are weak leaders rather than considering the fuller picture as presented in Chapter Six. This picture traces problems back to the legacy of long-term conflict and occupation, and the resultant lack of skilled, experienced people to lead. It also traces it to the need for



local NGOs to conform to new and unfamiliar styles of leadership and governance, as well as to the drain of good leaders into international higher paying jobs.

In the post-independence world of Timor-Leste there was not so much a clash of cultures but a blanketing effect where the new dominant culture - represented by the international aid industry - overlaid existing political structures, institutions and social and economic frameworks (Chapter Three). The old familiar, if dangerous, landscape was hidden and changed and local people struggled to find what was once familiar (Chapter Three), and even if they were to succeed in finding it, it had changed as new conditions and regulations were imposed.

In this newly revealed world, democracy and liberal governance became the norm and a rapid re-education of civil society ensued to acculturate people into the new style of government in which they needed to take part. However, cultural and social systems change slowly, and democracy in Timor-Leste did not come with the same social security safety nets that ensure, at least to some degree, a redistribution of wealth, social services and resources to the less well-off, as they do in established Western democracies. Local people, poorer and more disadvantaged than ever from long-term occupation, found themselves in the short-term reliant on handouts from the aid world while in the long-term remained dependent on the familial and village systems to maintain their economic and social security. It is little wonder that local NGOs in a post-conflict environment, where they are constantly searching for funds and engaged in crisis management, 'keep a toe in both camps'. Should violence erupt again they must be able to retreat quickly to their home villages to protect their families and so they must maintain ties with local leaders at home.

The overlaying, and at times suffocation, of local ways creates a dual system, but only one system can be right or at least recognised by the dominant culture. This is not to say that local people capitulate in deference to the implanted system. Rather, local NGOs become very proficient at both working around the 'accepted system' (Box 7.2) to achieve their goals, and utilising international staff to their advantage. It is not a one way process. However, liberal governance subtly modifies the existing system; not by punishing but by correcting, never acknowledging problems but 'finding new solutions' or 'new ways of working' (see Chapter Four). Returning again to the analogy of the faceless tiger, (see Chapter Four) it is difficult to see what you are fighting.

In this new environment the principles of 'good governance' become enshrined in the newly developing constitutions and organisational and management structures of emerging local NGOs, which, dependent on overseas aid, are eager to comply, at least superficially. After all, the principles of good governance, which define good leadership, management, financial accountability and compliance, provide the framework by which a local NGO will successfully be able to govern itself (although the structures and mechanisms it embodies may be largely foreign to them). They also provide the NGO with the best chance of obtaining funds. Nevertheless, the principles of good governance become the standards on which they are judged and on which they judge themselves and each other.

All of this would be fine perhaps, or at least acceptable, if we could be sure that the vision and mission that a local NGO owns for itself, its client group and its country, were not only shared by the international aid industry but also respected and upheld by it. While many international aid and development practitioners work tirelessly to ensure the best results for local people, and do so because they honestly believe in and work towards humanitarian goals, they are often hampered by circumstances outside their control as the international respondents in Chapter Seven openly stated. While those on the ground might be in tune with the aspirations of local NGOs and cognisant of the difficulties they face in meeting externally imposed conditions, they can do little to alter the agendas of those outside the country who are guided by and accountable to external authorities and influences and the inflexible bureaucratic systems that underpin them.

### **8.5 The Developer and the Developed**

KBH is a small actor on a much bigger stage. In some ways the criss-crossing local, national and international networks make it look as if KBH it is caught in a web, which in many ways it is. While KBH calls itself an independent NGO, it is not. It is dependent on international funds (primarily through APHEDA) which shape its character and agenda. APHEDA, while also 'independent', is nevertheless responsible to its donors - primarily Australian Union members - and as such must be seen to be spending money in support of its stated vision/mission and goals. Not to do so would mean a cut in funding.

In 2002-2004, APHEDA's financial support of KBH was partially reliant on funding from AusAID (the aid arm of the Australian government responsible for dispersing Australia's Overseas Development Assistance (ODA). As such KBH became indirectly responsible to AusAID, and through AusAID, KBH became accountable to

the Australian Government and its people. Equally, every connection KBH makes with an international organisation, whether a multilateral or bilateral agency or an international aid organisation, ties it and binds it in similar ways, and every string or thread has a set of conditions and regulations attached. Therefore, a small local NGO may believe it is independent but by entering into any relationship with an international organisation or agency it puts itself into the hands of forces it cannot see and is ill-placed to understand.

In negotiating with the aid world a small NGO like KBH would seem to hold few cards. Local NGOs are often lured, during the emergency and post-emergency stages of post-conflict recovery, into international partnerships and alliances which are not always based on a shared vision or a shared agenda. These relationships can lead to unequal relationships where the local NGOs can be 'swallowed up' or where internationals run roughshod over their local partners as observed by an international worker (Chapter Seven). They are, to use Stiglitz's analogy (see Chapter Four), like a small boat with an inexperienced crew cast in a vast ocean and subject to being swamped at any time.

They are also, as Fowler (1997) outlines (see Chapter Four), subject to intense scrutiny about nearly every aspect of their history, their structure, their vision/mission and objectives. International agencies and organisations do not lay themselves open to the same scrutiny. Nor are they always open about where their money comes from and to what conditions they are tied, or what political and economic motives drive their action.

## **8.6 Conclusion**

As is often the case when working 'on the ground' in a rapidly changing environment such as the post-conflict, post-emergency environment of Timor-Leste from 2004-2006, it was sometimes difficult to see beyond the immediate crisis or challenges faced everyday by local NGOs, to understand the goings on in the broader context of international aid and development policy. Thus there is a temptation to see issues and challenges faced by the local NGO merely in the light of what is happening at that time, within that space, and as a result of that immediate environment, rather than the causal factors behind it. For example, a small NGO that is continually searching for funds to run projects and pay staff, is overloaded with reporting requirements to meet donor agendas and also works in an unstable political environment, is in a constant state of crisis management. In this state, blame is easily attached to weak leadership and poor management, but simply changing one

set of leaders for another or giving them another course on leadership and management without addressing the underlying conditions, just treats the symptom rather than the cause.

Using the results of the study as presented in Chapters Six and Seven, namely that language, the lack of strong leadership, and financial management are the basic impediments to the successful participation of the local NGO, it would be easy to point to all the things an NGO might do to overcome these challenges; indeed they are obvious. It could be recommended that NGOs in Timor need language lessons, capacity building, technical support and advisers. They also need advice on how to play the system; they need guidance on how to present information so that it seems to be an extension of the donor organisation; they need to organise themselves in such a way that they can take advantage of that system. Pursuing the same line, recommendations to international practitioners might sound like this; “if you want to work with local NGOs you need to be more flexible, more supportive, more understanding of the difficulties they face”. To international organisations; “you could provide more operational funds, accept the realities of working in this country, the lack of qualified staff, the cultural boundaries at play, time, distance etc”. And yet it appears that having such knowledge has had seemingly little impact on the way that players in the development world continue to conduct themselves. The same mistakes continue to be made despite the embracing language of development and the endless repetition of lessons being learned over and over again.

The following chapter concludes the thesis and reflects on what can be taken from this study and to use that much used phrase, what “lessons can be learned”.

# Chapter Nine

## Conclusion

### 9.1 Introduction

In the post conflict, post-emergency environment of Timor-Leste a gap exists between rhetoric and practice. International aid practitioners who work on the ground in Timor-Leste recognise its existence and often feel helpless and constrained by their organisation's policies and practices, in trying to close the gap. It often appears that while the international aid world has taken on the language/discourse of inclusivity, partnerships, community based, bottom-up action, it overlays that upon a model of development and reconstruction that remains predicated on neoliberal, western, economic rationalist, principles. The 'lessons have been learned' and have informed the new language of development and the 'conduct of conduct' within the development field but the underpinning institutions and structures remain rooted in the past. In this environment local NGOs, assisted by well intentioned international aid practitioners, are often caught trying to bridge the gap as they struggle to reconcile the needs of their local communities to the often unrealistic consultation and implementation time-lines, lack of adequate funding and resources, and externally determined priorities of the aid industry. Perceived strengths or weaknesses in this context are not necessarily based upon a local NGO's ability to deliver a service to its community but rather upon its effectiveness in shaping itself to externally determined factors, sometimes seen and often invisible. It is the invisible challenges, as I have argued, that are the real barriers for local NGOs.

This study looked at the barriers to the successful participation of an NGO in Timor-Leste in the post conflict, post-emergency environment of aid and reconstruction, 2004-2005. Through ethnographic research a detailed picture of the NGO was obtained, barriers to the successful participation of the NGO were identified, and each was discussed in terms of: Internal factors (internal responses to externally imposed conditions); External factors (arising from direct contact with the aid industry); and Unseen barriers (forces at play that are invisible to the NGO). This chapter brings together the threads of the research as explored in the previous chapters, outlining the main conclusions of the study in relation to the overall research objectives. 'Lessons learned' are reflected upon in order to inform aid and

development policy in this area and to potentially guide future research into the subject.

## **9.2 Achieving the objectives**

### ***Building a detailed picture***

The primary purpose of this research was to gain a comprehensive picture of what it was to be a local NGO in the specific, post-conflict, post-emergency environment, of Timor-Leste. Immersion in the field over an extended period allowed me to build up a multi dimensional picture of KBH, its history, its culture, and the story of its birth as an NGO in 2002.

As a participant observer, and as an adviser, I was able to share and participate in every aspect of the life of KBH and its staff. I came to know not only KBH staff and their families, their experiences and history, but an extended network of young people who worked for similar NGOs and who shared a common passion for working for their country and for their people. Through close contact with these groups I came to understand the organisation in a way perhaps not afforded by short-term research field trips, often undertaken by consultants and researchers.

Through my experience at KBH I was also given the opportunity to witness the deeply felt ideological perspectives and heart-felt conviction of the staff and Board members of KBH. These convictions followed through into their work and into their relationships with their client communities and gave them the courage and strength to keep going on in the face of whatever barriers they encountered.

## **9.3 The History and Culture Shaping the NGO**

The first objective of the study was to document the operations of KBH, including its historical and ideological underpinnings, values and beliefs in order to understand how these elements shaped, and continue to shape, the work and structure of the organisation. Using the ethnographic methods outlined above, the study documented the operations of KBH as an organisation and a complete overview of KBH was formulated. This enabled me to identify the major ideological and historical factors that influenced the work of the organisation.

Firstly, KBH and its founding organisations had strong links with liberationist ideologies and principles drawn from South America. While these ideologies ran counter to mainstream aid and development models, these values remained strongly embedded in the workplace practice, the organisation's vision, mission and

objectives as well in the hearts and minds of KBH staff. These values incorporated socialist democratic philosophy and ideology and directly influenced the kind of organisations that KBH sought to work with, and the international organisations willing to work with it.

Secondly, KBH's vision and mission of social justice, and liberationist ideologies were largely informed by the experiences of KBH staff and Board members, in the student movements, solidarity groups and national resistance movements, alive in Timor in the time of Indonesian occupation. These principles influenced heavily the staff's approach to community work and their choice of education and training pedagogy. This shared vision also influenced the type of education and training courses they implemented, such as simple plough making, sustainable agricultural, and literacy; and the disadvantaged communities they targeted for assistance.

Lastly, the historical experience of the staff informed the way they worked and conceived of their role within the Timorese community. Most staff had experienced in some way the Indonesian occupation and the overwhelming oppression and violence of that period at a time in their lives when they were young university students. They all felt a genuine commitment to collective action and to social responsibility. This was evidenced in the way the organisation was formed and structured, and the way founding partners worked together cooperatively to form KBH. The ideological principles, beliefs, and history of KBH staff, and the founding partners, had a great impact on how the organisation was constituted and run. It also influenced the international partner it chose to work with during the post-emergency phase (APHEDA), and the way KBH worked and interacted with the community.

In the early period when funds were readily available and relatively free of attached regulations and conditions, KBH was easily able to maintain its vision and mission, and to implement its work in its own way (particularly with support from APHEDA as a sympathetic partner). However, as the post-emergency phase began to transition into long-term development, the operating environment for local NGOs became much more formalised and tightly structured. Because of these circumstances, KBH was forced to interact with a much wider group of international donor bodies. Suddenly KBH was no longer able to follow its own initiatives but was beholden to the directives of international donor organisations. These new directives threatened to shape not only how it worked, and who it worked with, but its organisational and management structure.

#### **9.4 Characterising Interactions between the Two Worlds**

The second objective of the study was to identify and describe the organisation's interactions and co-relationship with the international aid world, focusing on how the organisation was shaped by, and in turn shaped, that interaction. This objective was achieved by collecting field notes and conducting interviews with local and international staff. Extended immersion in the field afforded me many opportunities to experience first-hand relations between local NGOs and the major aid bodies, and how these relationships shaped the local organisation in diverse and subtle ways.

Three main factors were found to characterise the relationship between the NGO and the international aid world. These factors acted upon the NGO to shape it and guide its interaction with the outside world. Firstly, unequal power relations arising from funding dependence caused the NGO to change itself in order to conform to donor expectations and demands. Because the local NGO was beholden to the funding body it was often the case that the NGO had to change its own way of working rather than risk losing much needed funding. It also needed to change its structure in order to find approval, and to alter its operations in order to make itself more amenable to donor ways of working.

Secondly, these two worlds (that of the local NGO and the aid industry) remained increasingly separate throughout this period. The lack of understanding, (or apparent misunderstanding), between the two, resulted in an inability to bridge this gap. As a result, donors were neither attuned nor sympathetic to the needs of the NGO. This lack of perception translated in real terms to the NGO not receiving the necessary training, support, resources, salaries and operational funds to do their jobs well. In addition, unrealistic expectations and impossible time constraints were imposed on the local NGO, shifting the onus of responsibility to the NGO for the success or failure of projects.

Differing motivations also marked relations between the two bodies. It was often the case that where the motivations or goals of an NGO did not coincide with that of a donor, they were simply dismissed or went unacknowledged. Competing goals were often a source of confusion for local NGOs, which were often at a loss to explain donor disapproval when results aligned with the NGO's own notion of success. Such distance also led to injustices arising from donor policies that sought to look after a donor's own interests before that of the local NGO, for example, unequal pay and conditions.



From the time the aid world arrived in Timor-Leste, there emerged a two worlds' divide, the aid world on one side, and the local NGOs and the local community on the other. Often it was left to the NGO to straddle this gap. This shaped the organisation in major ways; physically, by altered organisational structures; behaviourally, through changed ways of working on the ground; and psychologically, through changed expectations and notions of self-determination.

However, while local NGOs are dependent on international donors, this is a co-dependent relationship. Donor organisations are also dependent on local NGOs as their link to local communities, and the means by which they maintain their legitimacy as 'aid' actors. If local NGOs were better informed about these relationships, they would be better able to negotiate them to their advantage and to the advantage of the communities they represent. Not by engaging in the 'game playing' but by open negotiation.

The third objective of the study was to identify the major challenges faced by the NGO in maintaining its vision and mission and conducting its activities as it navigates the transition from post-emergency to long-term development. This information was collected through participatory observation and interviews with local and international staff. The findings were grouped under three headings each of which represents a particular group of major barriers to the effective participation of a local NGO in the recovery of its country: Internal factors, external factors and unseen factors.

### ***Internal***

Internal challenges were seen as 'internal' in as far as they required an internal response to externally imposed conditions. That is, the adaptation to: new language and communication technologies; new styles of governance in leadership and organisational management; and new financial accountability processes and procedures. All of these challenges were coupled with the lack of experienced and skilled staff knowledgeable in the way an NGO in the post-emergency phase should operate, and even less experienced in how a NGO should be run after the transition in to long-term development prescribed by the aid industry. These challenges were also related to low salaries and the lack of job security for local staff, and the tendency to hire family and friends over merit-based employment criteria, due in part to the complex Timor-Leste familial system, and issues of obligation and security.

These challenges affected the NGO in major ways. Firstly, they were blocked from communicating with donors, engaging in debate and accessing knowledge therefore limiting the degree of control or say they had in projects. The NGO also found itself operating in a new environment in which a new system overlaid the existing one. The system was not only unfamiliar and discordant with Timorese systems, but it necessitated the dependence on international staff, who in turn served as a kind of 'Trojan Horse' for the importing of new ideological perspectives that may have subverted the original ideological basis of the NGO. New notions of 'good governance' also devalued existing systems and rendered them increasingly impracticable in the new environment. Anything that is not aligned with the dominant culture is rendered obsolete by it. In its wake, the local NGO is left struggling to maintain its legitimacy and to keep its 'head above water'. More importantly, the NGO ends up serving the needs of the aid industry rather than the communities they set out to serve.

### ***External***

The 'external' issues, also referred to in this thesis as interface issues, related more directly to KBH's direct contact with the aid industry, and its daily interactions with the international aid world. These interactions included: 1) the maintenance of existing ideologies, vision and mission in a world dominated by an apposing ideology; 2) attempts to develop and maintain equal partnerships and other relationships while reliant on donor funding; 3) attempts to establish legitimacy in the minds of donors; 4) attempts to maintain integrity and independence in representing community needs against donor-driven criteria for project implementation and aid targets; 5) attempts to meet unrealistic timelines and expectations while underfunded and understaffed; 6) and the difficulty in trying to build strong networks with a culture that, maintains its distance and appears to know best.

The external challenges for the NGO here are great and can be seen to work on the organisation in the following ways. Firstly, moving outside the prevailing systems of operation and the dominant ideology can lead to retribution. Secondly, the NGO may end up committing to jobs that they are not capable of doing or working in ways that go against their beliefs. New rules and regulations come into effect and they must be learned and abided by, or else penalties are incurred, often typified by the withdrawal of funding support.

Instead of two groups working together and the interface being located at the site of the junction between the implementing partner (the local NGO) and funding

organisations (the donor) and the target community, the interface is instead located between the donor and the NGO. The local NGO as the one caught in the middle is the one which must negotiate this terrain, attempting to satisfy both sides, and generally sacrificing its own interests in the process. This sacrifice can be monetary, through having to make up for inadequate pay or resource provisions, or operationally through changing its processes and approach in order to consider the donor's objectives and desires.

Where the NGO cannot meet with donor directives or live up to donor expectations it must change. When faults or gaps occur in the arrangement between donor and NGO then the NGO must make up the difference. Where barriers exist, it is mainly left to the NGO to absorb the responsibility and deal with difficulties encountered. This means, at the end of the day, that the people the aid world are supposedly there to support are actually in many ways supporting the aid world, often camouflaging the inability of these players (international donor organisations) to work competently and conscientiously in the post-emergency context.

### ***Hidden barriers***

Hidden or underlying factors also present challenges that act as real barriers to the effective participation of a local NGO in the post-conflict, post-emergency environment. These unseen barriers are hidden in the 'sub-text' of development embedded in its language, the invisible blanketing of existing systems with new, and the subjugation of the NGO within the larger system.

Whilst the factors themselves might be invisible, the effects of these hidden challenges are all too visible and real. Through the use of language as a mechanism of governance, NGOs are increasingly governed, manipulated, and directed by the very words used to define them, and to describe the work they do. This language permeates the field of work in which they operate and shapes the mentality of staff in subtle and deliberate ways towards new ways of thinking and acting that are aligned with the will of the governing bodies.

Through the unspoken overlaying of a foreign system of government on top of that of the existing system, brings with it, a myriad of subtle judgments and a devaluing of traditional systems and ways of working. The new system brings with it entirely different ways of working and staff struggle to change whilst all the while problems are located in the NGO rather than in the directives that are being imposed upon them.

## 9.5 Conclusions

The NGO is one small independent actor in a sea of giant corporations including UN agencies, international financial institutions, large international aid organisations, and foreign governments. Each organisation comes with its own directives, motives and agendas, and the local NGO can be 'swallowed up' by the sheer number of bodies it must serve. The work of the local NGO becomes the work of translating reality into a format palatable for the international head office; fiddling with numbers, changing roles, obscuring results, all so that the donor organisations can say they have achieved their objectives to meet their own externally imposed regulations and expectations. It is the inability to understand or detect the subtle mechanisms of governance that often limits the degree to which an NGO can be said to act self-determinedly or in full awareness of the situation as it navigates a path through this foreign and often baffling post-emergency environment.

Many of the challenges faced by local NGOs identified in this study are a direct result of operating in this post-conflict environment to a largely characterised by the rushed imposition of a new western-style governing body over existing or colonial forms of governance. This supplanting or overlaying means that local organisations find themselves having to contend not only with a foreign language but foreign systems and structures that dictate how they will operate and manage their organisations. Such problems, however, are not dissimilar to those of other developing nations struggling to find their way in the global context. It is not a unique experience for a new nation's survival in this environment to be contingent on its ability to effectively align itself with the aims of prevailing rationalities and forms of governance.

Another interesting conclusion has been the particular way in which these larger global trends manifest themselves in the minutiae of the donor-NGO relationship on the ground in Timor-Leste, in the directives the international donor imposes in order to carry out its mission, and the major challenges faced by the NGO in rising to meet these demands. More often than not, the everyday operations of the organisation are changed, staff apply themselves to learning new behaviours and different ways of working, and the overall objectives, mission and vision of the NGO become second in importance to the donor criteria upon which their successful fulfilment are contingent.

## 9.6 Lessons Learned?

What might aid practitioners take from this research? That we have a responsibility as aid professionals to understand the meanings behind the conditions and regulations we ask local NGOs to comply with: that we listen more and direct less; and that we ensure that what we think is best for local people is really what they want and what will work for them in the long run. Nothing strong can be built without a foundation — Timor-Leste NGOs have a foundation and they need time, support and space to build the structure that best suits their needs in their country. That is, it is not good enough to transpose a set of 'blue prints' from one country to another and impose them on a community as if one shape fits all — it does not work in the west, so why should it be any different in a developing country? Finally, aid practitioners 'on the ground' must continue to pressure their organisations to make institutional and structural changes to their systems so that they can respond more flexibly and less prescriptively to the needs of local organisations.

What might international aid organisations take from this? That they should be as open to scrutiny by local NGOs as local NGOs are to their scrutiny — local NGOs need to know who they are dealing with and what agendas they are meeting. Their donors need to be aware that funds do not need to be spent in a single year but spread across an extended timeframe, and used when the country is most able and ready to make use of it effectively. That time-lines, funding models and expectations need to be realistic. That progress in post-conflict countries is slow and erratic and often entails, for a local NGO, three steps forward and two steps back. Violence can re-emerge at any time, and while the aid world can be air-lifted out when conflict threatens their safety in the new democracy, local people must stay and maintain their safety in the best way they can.

What might researchers take from this? Ethnographic research can yield rich and detailed insights to complex situations such as in the post-conflict, post-emergency world of Timor-Leste. In conducting this type of research, however, the researcher must continually challenge their own preconceived values and beliefs they take to the field, their own actions within the field; and the story they bring from the field. They can also tell a story that is unable to be told in any other way. By this means, they can inform, even if in a small way, the discourse of development.

We need to listen to dissenting voices, as these are catalysts of change. We also need to be aware that when liberalism subsumes its opposition and takes on its language, in doing so it also subsumes meaning, and twists it, often depriving the very people who need it most, of the language of their struggle and potentially their movement forward.

### **9.7 Future Research**

This research was primarily explorative. It is the type of research that brings to the surface issues that need pursuing in much more depth. It has certainly highlighted the need for further investigation into the gap between rhetoric and practice; and why it should occur when one party at least is aware of its implications and the difficulties it presents for local players in developing nations.

Perhaps we might also do well to examine development not from the point of view of criticism but truth seeking and critical analysis. Injustices may lay hidden under emotional responses longer than if they are simply and openly talked of, in clear terms, and understood as the differing motivations of the various parties involved.

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## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> Timor-Leste became the official name for Timor-Leste in 2002. Local people refer to it as Timor Lorosae. Others may refer to it as East Timor.

<sup>2</sup> These stages are broad terms that reflect the stages of aid intervention rather than Timor-Leste's progress. They are characterised differently by different aid organisations and agencies but for this research and the sake of clarity the emergency period represents post 1999 to 2002; post-emergency represents 2002-2004, long term development represents 2004 onwards.

<sup>3</sup> The Timor-Leste Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation (CAVR) records officially document the violence and human rights abuses which took place before 1975 until after independence.

<sup>4</sup> Hunt (2004), notes that in Timor-Leste the difference between NGOs and CSOs is hard to define however Holloway sees them as quite different (2004).

<sup>5</sup> In late 2000 Brunnstrom was commissioned by Oxfam to report on local NGOs while Hunt has written a comprehensive history of NGOs preceding the independence vote to 2004.

<sup>6</sup> See Hunt 2004, for a more detailed account of the tensions that developed during this time.

<sup>7</sup> Multilaterals are international financial institutions including the World Bank and the IMF and all the United Nations agencies such as UNESCO, UNICEF, and the ILO.

<sup>8</sup> Bilateral agencies such as AusAID, CIDA, JICA, are responsible to one Government and represent that Governments overseas development interests.

<sup>9</sup> The non-formal sector is outside the formal primary, secondary and tertiary system and usually involves participants with little or no formal education. The focus of this type of education is on vocational/livelihoods training which will result in direct income generating activities for participants.

<sup>10</sup> Some became key informants

<sup>11</sup> Local language.

<sup>12</sup> A multinational force authorised by the United Nations security council charged with restoring peace and security in Timor-Leste.

<sup>13</sup> On 20 May, 2002 The United Nations formally handed over administration to the democratically elected government and East Timor formally became Timor-Leste.

<sup>14</sup> McKechnie is the Country Director for Afghanistan, Butane, Maldives, and regional programs in South Asia Region, World Bank.

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<sup>15</sup> Richard Halloway in a paper titled What is Civil Society in Timor Leste? Examines the definition of civil society organisations and NGOs and draws a distinction between them.

<sup>16</sup> Most of this section draws heavily on the work of Janet Hunt who made a full and extensive study of NGOs in Timor-Leste before and after 1999, documenting their history and contribution to the resistance struggle and their continuing part in the re-building of Timor-Leste.

<sup>17</sup> Jose Ramos Horta was the 1996 joint winner of the Noble Peace prize and in 2002 became the Minister for Foreign Affairs in the new Timor-Leste Government.

<sup>18</sup> Brunnstrom unashamedly focuses largely on the views of local NGOs in an attempt, as she describes to redress the imbalance.

<sup>19</sup> Ishuka does not cite any local NGO workers in this paper. The one NGO worker he cites is a foreign worker, working with a local organisation.

<sup>20</sup> The reestablishment of the NGO forum was supported by the UN OCHA, see Hunt 2003, for a more detailed history.

<sup>21</sup> KL.32 is a young female NGO worker involved in a women's NGO before and after independence.

<sup>22</sup> see world bank and un docs

<sup>23</sup> APHEDA- Union Aid Abroad (Australian People for Health, Education and Development Abroad) is the overseas aid agency of the Australian Council of Trade Unions.

<sup>24</sup> Timor-Leste solidarity partners.

<sup>25</sup> As APHEDA was at the time seeking funding from AusAID for capacity building, support from AusAID this was an essential element of that funding.

<sup>26</sup> The rent paid to KBH was much appreciated for it was a vital source of income for KBH, who were responsible for financing the maintenance and security of the building on a monthly basis.

<sup>27</sup> APHEDA's funding at this stage was through union donations and AusAID, ANCP funding.

<sup>28</sup> There is a difference in opinion as to the exact percentage depending on the survey: 6 of May 2001 Report from The Asia Foundation, entitled *Timor-Leste National Survey of Voter Knowledge (Preliminary Findings)*. "27% of Timor-Leste between the ages of 35-50 can speak Portuguese, as opposed to only 11% of those under 25".

<sup>29</sup> The use of the Trojan Horse metaphor was inspired by the work of Dominique Temple who referred to NGOs as Trojan Horses. The text appeared in

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Rahnema, M & Bawtree, V 1996, *The post-development reader*, Zed Books, New Jersey.

<sup>30</sup> From interviews with two CEOs of bilateral organisations.

<sup>31</sup> At the time of the interviews four of the fifteen internationals interviewed worked for multilateral agencies (United Nations agencies), three worked for bilateral agencies (for example, US Aid and AUSAID) (two of this group were senior managers), five worked for international non-government organisations, two worked for local government supported by bi-lateral funding, and one like myself, worked for a local NGO.

<sup>32</sup> Many volunteer organisations pay for Tetun language courses for their volunteer staff either on arrival in Timor-Leste or prior to departure from their home country, and in some cases both.